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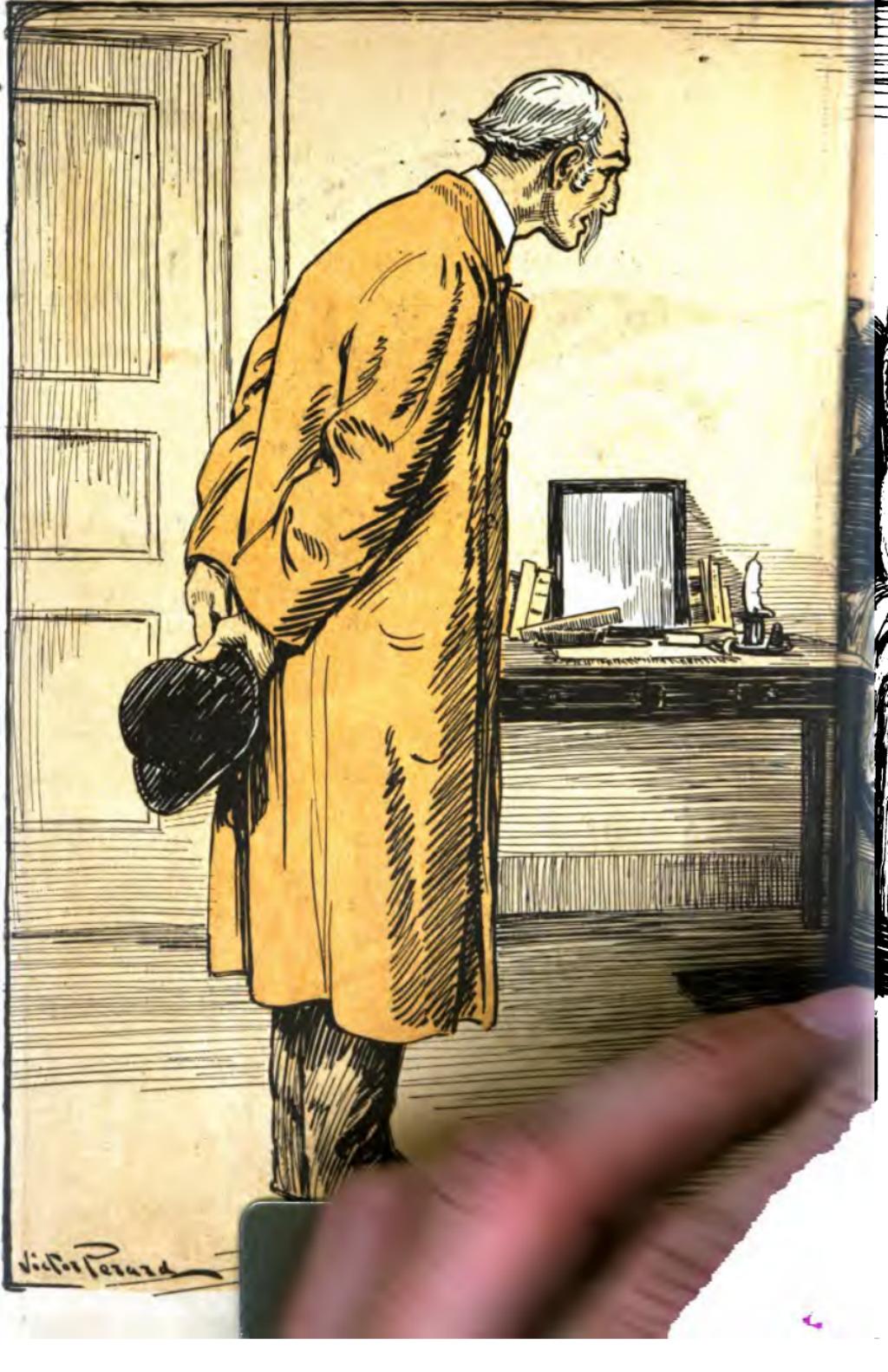


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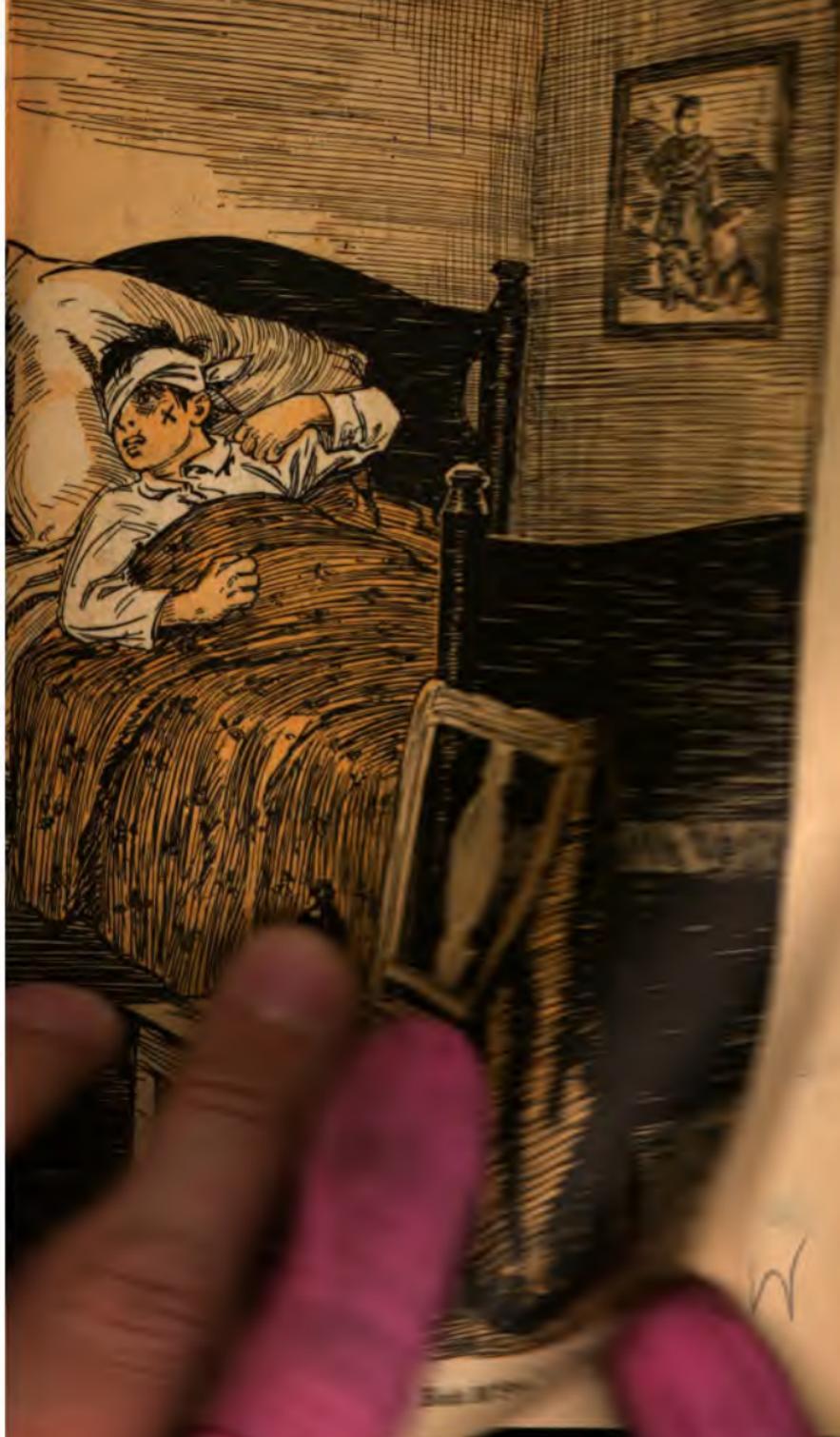
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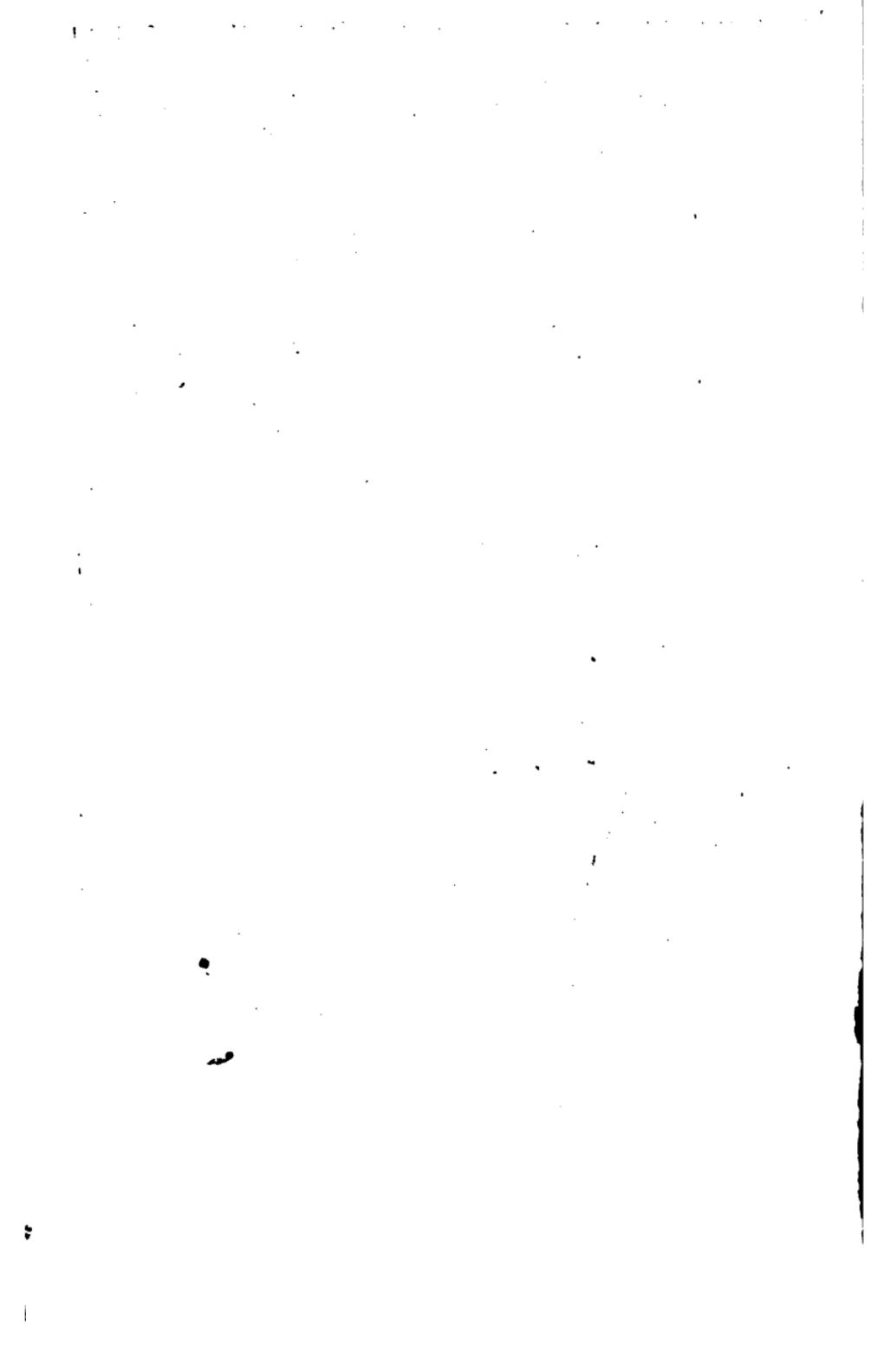


By
J.J. Bell.



Victor Perard





**THE INDISCRETIONS OF
MAISTER REDHORN**

Bell
NCW



"An' had to rin' for 't." (Page 13.)

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9/9/28

THE INDISCRETIONS OF MAISTER REDHORN

BY

J. J. BELL

AUTHOR OF "OH! CHRISTINA!" "WHITHER THOU GOEST,"
"WEE MACGREGOR," "WULLIE MCWATTIE'S
MASTER," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
VICTOR PERARD



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“Come back, an I'll lend ye the three pound.” (Page 74.)

**TO MY FRIEND
FLEMING H. REVELL, JUNIOR**

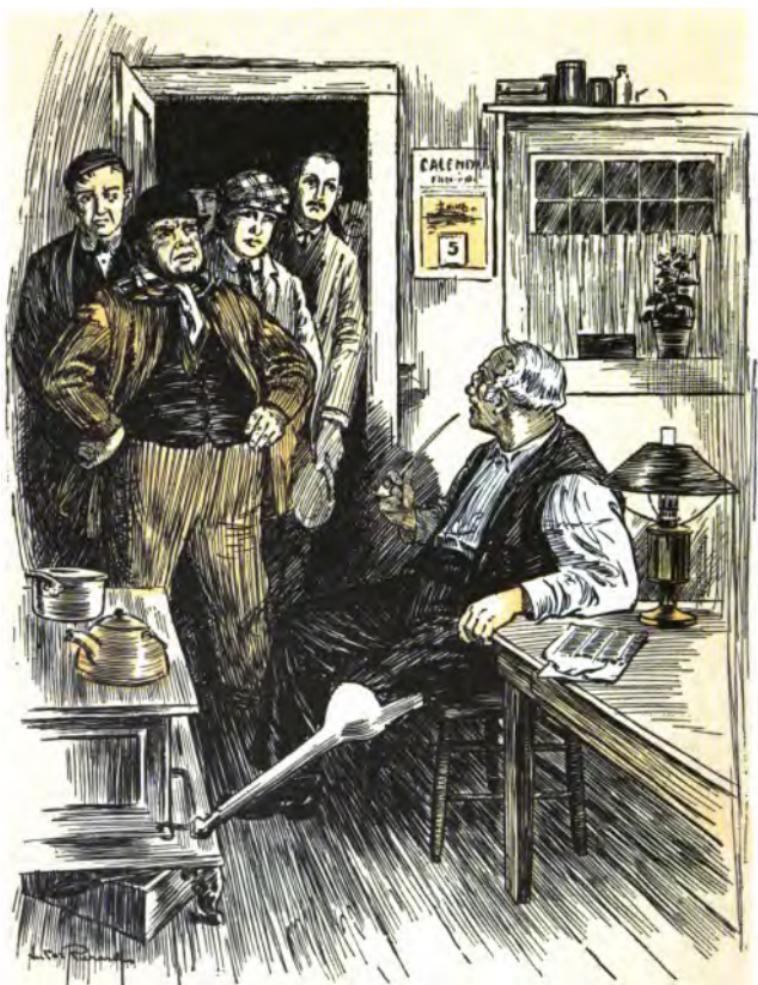
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“Whisht, pussy!” he whispered. (Page 21.)

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“We demand possession o’ the leg.” (Page 162.)

THE INDISCRETIONS OF MAISTER REDHORN

I

THE SINGULAR PICTURE

DID ye never try pentin' picturs,
Maister Ridhorn?"

Willie put the question as they trudged homewards from a day's work on a house wherein the mural decorations were numerous and large.

"That question," replied Mr. Redhorn gravely, "tiches a sair spot. Nevertheless, Wullie, I canna blame ye for askin' it. I suppose I betrayed masel' the day—gloatin' on Maister McBean's collection o' maisterpieces, an'—"

"Was ye gloatin' when ye trampit on the potty an' knockit ower the thinner?" inquired the boy.

"It's no' necessary to refer to sic unsavoury episodes," Mr. Redhorn returned shortly. "Maicht is no' as guid as it used to be. I was gaun to tell ye a fac' aboot Maister McBean's picturs—a fac' that he confidet to me when I was in his hoose yin nicht, last winter, to

see if I could suggest onything for the black-beetles infestin' his premises. He had jist got oot the decanter frae the chiffoneer, when he turns suddenly to me, an' says—‘ Ridhorn, I see ye're admirin' ma picturs.’ I wasna really admirin' them jist at that moment. I had merely avertit ma gaze frae the decanter—no' that I'm a stric' teetotaler; but I think it's mair polite to be ready to gi'e a wee stert o' surprise when the invitation comes. So I jist said—‘ Yer picturs is gorgeous specimens o' the artist's skill, Maister McBean.’ He seemed rale pleased at ma appreciation, an' commenced for to tell me aboot the different picturs, for he was an ardent lover o' art. He tell't me there wasna a pictur in the room—the room we was last in the day—no' a pictur that cost him less nor three-pound-ten. ‘ That's a fac’!’ says he, and set doon the decanter on the table wi' a bang—an' forgot to lift it again. Oh, he was rale ta'en up wi' his picturs, an' I cam' awa' that nicht wi' ma heid in a bizz. I was tryin' this efternune to coont up what his picturs wud be worth, an' allooin' seeven pound for the biggest yin, I wud say he had aboot ninety pound in picturs a'thegither! Of course, ye maun bear in mind, Wullie, that there wasna ony Auld Maisters amang them, itherwise——” Mr. Redhorn paused to think of a good enough price for an Old Master.

“ What did ye dae aboot the black beetles?” asked Willie.

“I wasna speakin’ aboot beetles.”

“But ye said——”

“Wullie, Wullie,” said the painter reproachfully, “wud ye rayther hear aboot clocks nor Auld Maisters?”

“Uh-ha. What did ye dae to them?”

“Naething. It was gaun to be an expensive j’inerin’ an’ plesterin’ job to get the better o’ them, an’ Maister McBean decidet to let weel alone, as he ca’ed it. So the beetles was spared, an’, I presume, are still thrivin’. But it’s nane o’ ma business, I’m gled to say.”

“When was it ye tried to pent picturs?” the boy inquired after a short silence.

“In ma youth,” replied Mr. Redhorn, “in ma young an’ balmy days. But I didna pent picturs, Wullie—picturs in the plural. I only done a singular pictur. Accordin’ to ma uncle that employed me then, the singular pictur was suffeecient to demonstrate to a blin’ man that Joseph Ridhorn wasna a genius, buddin’ or itherwise. ‘Tak’ it awa, an’ if ye winna burn it, droon it!’ was the words o’ ma respectit uncle. But ma mither got the haud o’ ‘t, an’ I fun’ it in her press efter she dee’d. I’ve nae doot yer ain mither wud dae the same, Wullie. If we was hauf as guid an’ clever as wur mithers thocht we was, it wud be an extr’or’nar’ fine warld. . . . Hooever, ma uncle was a critique in his wey—a critique bein’ a human bein’ wi’ the feelin’s o’ a steam-hammer—an’ he said I was never to dae it again, or he wud report

it to the polis. I never done it again. I disposed o' ma boax o' pents to a man that was gaun to New Zealand, an' he sailed wi'oot peyin' me."

"What was yer pictur aboot? What was wrang wi' it?" the boy inquired.

"The subjec' o' the pictur was unreproachable. It was jist a lan'scape—a rural lan'scape, wi' animal an' vegetable an' ither feegures in the midst thereof." He sighed, and continued: "Ye see, laddie, the ambeetion to pent a pictur cam' ower me kin' o' suddent-like. There was an artist chap cam' to the place I was in, an' stertit to pent a pictur. It was a Seturday efternune, an' I was watchin' him. He pentit a haystack wi' a tree an' a byre at each side, an' twa-three hens in the middle, an' a vera rid sky on the tap. He said he was gaun to name it 'Eve,' but I thocht to masel' he nicht as weel ha'e named it 'Adam.' That was ma eegnorance, Wullie. The eegnorance o' youth is only surpassed by its consate. I thocht I could pent as guid a pictur ony day. An' I squandered ma savin's on pents an' brushes an' a canvas thirty-sax inches by twinty-fower."

"That wud be a big pictur, Maister Ridhorn," observed Willie, who was now interested.

"Nae bigger nor ma consate," said the painter ruefully. "Then, on the next Seturday, I sallied forth, as the novelles say, an' commenced operations. I thocht I wud ha'e a shot at a lan'scape. It seemed that easy. So

I kep' a bricht lookoot for a suitable yin. I had jist got sicht o' a maist attractive yin, when I pit ma fit in a wasp's bike, an' had to rin' for 't. I got a sting on ma broo that raised a lump like a hen's egg. Oh, ye needna laugh, laddie!"

"I couldna help it."

"Weel, weel, I suppose ye couldna. Ye werena stung. . . . Weel, at last I cam' to a view that seemed to me to be cryin' oot to be pentit. So I set up ma easel, that I had borrowed frae a man, that had seized it frae an artist that couldna pey his ludgins. Then I pit ma canvas on the easel. Then I got ready ma pents. Then I conseedered what to begin wi'. Ever since then I've been wonderin' hoo artists ken what to begin wi'. To me it was a conundrum. It stunned me like the question on a conversation lozenger I yinst got frae a young leddy. It——"

"What was the question, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Never you mind, Wullie. . . . But, at last I made up ma mind to begin wi' the objec' o' interest that was nearest me. It was a fence. So I begood wi' that at the fit o' the canvas, allooin' aboot twa inches. The fence took me langer nor I had bargained for, but I got it feenished at last. Then, ower the fence, there was a field wi' coos. I done the field rough-like. It was a rough field onywey. But it feenished ma green pent. It was a guid-sized field, so I alloood ten inches for it. That was

a foot o' ma canvas went. There was trees on the richt-haun', but, as I said, ma green pent was exhaustit. Then I couldna pit in the coos till the field was dry. So I pit in the fence at the faur end o' the field. It lookit wee, so I jist alloood it an inch. An' then it lookit queer."

The painter paused in his recital.

"An' what next?" asked the boy eagerly.

"Oh, the midges got shockin' bad, an' efter a while I couldna thole them, forbye they was stickin' to ma pictur in legions. An' ma broo was as sair as toothache. So I packit up, an' gaed awa' hame."

"Was that a' yer pictur?"

"Na, na. Every Seturday, for twa month, I gaed to the same spot an' did ma best to mak' a pictur o' what I seen. I got in some o' the coos—I didna attemp' the lot—their legs was that confusin' when they werena staun'in' square—an' I wud ha'e gotten in a wheen craws, if they had sat still. Then there was a hoose faur furrit on the left haun', an' I got that in, wi' a wee man at the door. The wee man wasna really there. He was an oreeginal idea o' ma ain. Then there was twa-three fields ayont the first yin, wi' fences that got wee-er an' wee-er. But I got them in!" said the painter triumphantly.

In a chastened voice he continued—"Ayont the fields there was a plantation. I wasna feart for that, for I had providet plenty green

for emergencies. But when I had gotten in the plantation, I made a sad discovery. Ay, it was awfu' disapp'intin'! But here yer hoose, Wullie," he said abruptly. " Guid-nicht to ye, an' gi'e——"

" But what was the discovery, Maister Redhorn?" said Willie.

" Never heed. Yer mither'll be waitin' for ye."

" Aw, but please tell us," pleaded the boy.

" Weel," said Mr. Redhorn unwillingly, " I discovered that I had made an error. I had stertit wi' ower sma' a canvas. When I had gotten in the plantation, there was nae room left for the hills an' the sky. . . . Guid-nicht, laddie. Ma respec's to yer mither."

II

POOR PUSSY

“**W**ELL, Mr. Redhorn,” said Miss Waldie, halting at the foot of the staircase, “you will let me have an estimate for the papering and painting, by to-morrow night at latest?”

“I wull that, and thenk ye, mem. I think I understaun’ what ye want, mem, a’ excep’ for the lobby—or, I sud say, the vestibewl. I preshume ye’ll be wantin’ something elaborate in the stencil line, on the tap o’ the pink. Maybe something o’ the nature o’ Prince o’ Wales’s feathers in a nice rich broon, or conventional comets in licht green, or——”

“Oh, we’ll see about that later on. I haven’t yet quite decided on painting the hall, but we can discuss it after I have seen your estimates for the rooms upstairs.”

“As ye please, mem, jist as ye please. But I wud advise the comets. They’re maist effective, forbye bein’ an oreeginal stencil o’ ma ain. Weel, I’ll mak’ up the estimate the nicht, an’ thenk ye, mem.” Mr. Redhorn turned to the door.

“Stay a minute,” said the elderly lady.

“There’s just one little thing you might do to oblige me.”

“Jist mention it, mem,” said the painter gallantly.

Miss Waldie raised her voice. “Kate!” she called, “bring me the basket.”

A maid came from the kitchen, bearing a small closed basket, about eighteen inches long, twelve broad, and as many in depth.

“Give it to Mr. Redhorn, Kate.”

Kate handed it to the painter and retired.

The painter took the basket, and nearly dropped it, as a dismal wail came from the interior.

“It’s a cat,” remarked the lady solemnly.

“I—I thocht it wud be that frae its v’ice, mem,” Mr. Redhorn returned, recovering himself.

“And I should be very much obliged if you would kindly place it in the sea, on your way home, Mr. Redhorn.”

“Droon it?” he gasped.

“Precisely. I am no lover of cats, but foolishly I took this one to please a friend who was in Airport for the summer. Since then it has been a perfect pest to me. I have given it away repeatedly, and it has always come back. And this morning it killed and ate two of my dear little canaries!”

“Weel, weel,” murmured Mr. Redhorn in a tone of sympathy. “A’ the same,” he continued, whilst the prisoner protested violently,

“ye’ll maybe excuse me for remindin’ ye, mem, that the Lord made cats wi’ appetites for canaries an’ ither fowls o’ the air. We canna blame the cat, puir beastie, for daein’ what’s jist natural. I’m vexed to hear aboot yer bit birdies, but I hope ye’ll let the cat aff this time, if ye please, mem.”

“The cat must be drowned,” said the lady mercilessly. “Your remarks do you credit, Mr. Redhorn; but did you ever lose pets in such a cruel fashion?”

“The only pet I ever had,” said the painter, with a sigh, “was a hedgehog, mem. An’ some-hoo or ither it didna thrive in the hoose, an’ when I let it oot yin nicht to get fresh air, the puir beast got rin ower wi’ a nesty deevil—I beg yer paardon, mem—I meant for to say a scorchin’ motor-caur. Ay, mem, I was vexed for the hedgehog; an’ I heard afterwards that the motor-caur got aff wi’oot a single puncture. But that was the only pet I ever had.”

Miss Waldie listened patiently enough to this recital. “Yes,” she said, “but supposing the motor-car had been a cat, Mr. Redhorn?”

“In that case, mem,” said the painter, with a sad smile, “it wud certainly ha’e got punctured. Excuse me mentionin’ sic a thing, mem,” he hurriedly added, stroking his straggling moustache.

“I don’t think we need discuss the matter further,” said the spinster, with dignity. “I

have asked you to oblige me by placing this horrid, wicked cat in the sea. Will you——”

“ Could I no’ gi’e it awa’ to somebody, mem? There’s maybe somebody on the shore that wud like a cat. I wud be pleased to inquire at every door, mem, afore I had the puir beast destroyed.”

Miss Waldie frowned. “ I have told you already that I have given the cat away on several occasions—in vain. I am quite convinced that there can be no safety for my birds until the wretched creature is put an end to. Of course, if you refuse to oblige me, Mr. Redhorn——” She paused, looking sternly at him through her glasses; threateningly, it seemed to the painter.

Mr. Redhorn thought of the estimate for a big and welcome job—trade was rather quiet just then—and he remembered that a young and pushing painter had just started business in Kinlochan, only four miles away.

A squall came from the basket.

“ Weel, mem,” he said sorrowfully, “ it’s your cat, an’ if ye ask me to droon it, I’ll jist ha’e to droon it.”

“ Thank you,” said the lady. “ I’m sorry there is no other way. Drowning, I understand, is quite a painless death. Of course, the matter is strictly between ourselves, Mr. Redhorn. I—I do not wish to hurt the feelings of my friend who gave me the cat, and who will be in Fairport again next summer. You understand?”

"Perfec'ly, mem. I prefer secrecy for ma ain sake."

For a moment the lady stared; then she appeared satisfied. She stepped to the front door and opened it.

"I know you will do it as humanely as possible, Mr. Redhorn," she said, while the occupant of the basket made doleful protest, "and you won't forget the estimate. I think it is highly probable that I shall decide to have the hall done as well as the rooms, and I shall be glad to see what the comets are like."

"Thenk ye, mem. I'll attend to a' yer instructions, includin' the puir cat, to the best o' ma abeelity. Guid-nicht, mem. . . . Aw, beg yer paardon, mem—but dae ye want the cat drooned with or withoot the basket!"

"Oh, you mustn't throw away my good basket!"

"Vera weel, mem." And Mr. Redhorn went down the garden path.

It was half-past six o'clock on a dark November evening. Less than a quarter of a mile away lay the village proper, and Mr. Redhorn with his bitterly complaining charge prayed that he might reach home without encountering any acquaintances. Not a month ago he had publicly reprimanded some Fairport boys for tormenting a cat.

He had gone but half-way, however, when he heard footsteps approaching. He squeezed himself through a convenient hole in the hedge.

“ Whisht, pussy ! ” he whispered.

The cat did all it could to attract attention. Nearer and nearer came the footsteps, and Mr. Redhorn, perspiring in the chilly air, recognized the voices of the Misses Lavendar, “ the kindest leddies in Fairport,” as the natives called them. The ladies were almost at the gate of their own garden.

“ Whisht, pussy ! ” he whispered again.

The footsteps ceased.

“ Oh, Lucy,” said a gentle voice, “ do you hear that poor cat ? ”

“ Yes. It sounds like a strayed cat. . . . Pussy, pussy ! Where are you, poor pussy ? ” said another and equally gentle voice.

“ It’s scratching at something, Lucy. Can it have got caught in a trap ? ”

“ I never heard of traps here, Mary.”

Both the ladies called again, repeatedly, but without success.

“ The poor thing must be caught somehow. Let’s hurry up to the house, and get the lantern,” said Miss Mary, and after assuring pussy of their speedy return the two charitable souls hastened on their errand of mercy.

Mr. Redhorn groaned as he came forth and sped homewards. “ What wud the Miss Lavendars think o’ Joseph Ridhorn, if they kent what he was efter the nicht ? ” he asked himself.

To his relief a smart shower of rain came on, and sent all the villagers indoors ere he drew

near his dwelling. Glancing furtively behind him, he let himself into his house. He groped his way through the darkness till he came to the table, on which he deposited the basket. Something fell and smashed itself on the floor.

He uttered an exclamation. "That'll be the new jam," he reflected.

He struck a match and applied it to the lamp.

"Ay: it's jist the jam. . . . Whisht, pussy! D'ye think naebody has trouble but yersel'? Noo I'm gaun to let ye oot, an' ye maun enjoy yersel' as weel's ye're able, till yer time comes, puir beastie." Mr. Redhorn had decided that the execution should not take place so long as a light burned in Fairport. At midnight, probably, it would be safe to steal down to the pier and—

He lifted the lid of the basket, and the cat jumped out. It was a white cat with a black patch over one eye, which gave it a disreputable appearance.

"Ye're no' a thing o' beauty onywey, puir pussy," he remarked. "Ye didna cost yer mistress five pound when ye was a pup, or she wudna ha'e mindit ye gettin' a canary noo an' then. I suppose ye'll be wantin' something to eat. Ye dinna look as if ye had been pampered. There's naethin' o' the fatted cauf aboot you! I suppose ye've had naethin' since the canaries: an' what's in a couple o' wee canaries for a big cat like you? Eh, pussy?"

He stooped and stroked the cat that had begun to rub against his leg.

“We'll see if there's onything in the press.”

He crossed the untidy room and opened a cupboard.

“I doot I'll ha'e to gang oot an' get ye some mulk,” he said presently. “Behave yersel' till I come back.”

Five minutes later he reappeared with a small jug of milk.

“Criftens!” he cried. “What's that ye've got the haud o' ? Ma kipper! the kipper for ma supper! Oh, ye bad cat! An' ye've ett it a' but the heid an' tail.”

His hand rose threateningly and—fell to his side.

“Na!” he said. “I canna strike ye, puir pussy. It's yer last bit pleesure. Even a murderer gets an egg to his breakfast, just afore he gangs to the scaffold. I dinna grudge ye the kipper, pussy. Come awa' an' get yer mulk.”

He filled a saucer and laid it on the ragged rug in front of the hearth. Then he stirred the fire and put on the kettle. When he had set the table with a plate, knife, cup and saucer, loaf of bread, portions of butter and cheese, and a dish containing some jam saved from the wreck, he charged the teapot, placed it on the hob, and seated himself in his old easy-chair to await the kettle's boiling.

Mr. Redhorn did most things domestic with

his own hands; the little assistance he desired he purchased from a village woman, who came for an hour every morning to wash a small accumulation of dishes, make the bed, and leave the room clean if not tidy.

“Dod! ye’re a whale for mulk!” he observed to the cat who, having emptied the saucer, was licking his whiskers and looking for more nourishment. “Here ye are, pussy!” He reached for the jug, and refilled the saucer. “It’s pleesanter gettin’ ootside liquid nor gettin’ inside it. Eh? Puir bit beastie! ‘Deed, I never had a great opeenion o’ canaries. Their colour’s whiles guid, frae a penter’s pint o’ view, but I couldna thole their screechin’. It’s a peety Miss Waldie didna hing them up higher, so as a cat couldna get at them. I hope I didna offend her the nicht, an’ I hope she’ll decide to ha’e her lobby pentit. There’s been awfu’ little in the decorative line in Fairport this while back. I hope ma haun’ hasna’ lost its cunnin’. I wud like fine to see ma comets on her wa’. It wud be a graun’ advertisement. . . . Weel, pussy, are ye feelin’ better noo? Ye’re for a bit nap, are ye? Puir beastie!” he murmured, as the cat curled up on the rug. “Ye mind me o’ a pictur I seen yinst in a paper. I think it was ca’ed ‘The Last Sleep o’ Argyle.’ The puir duke was gaun to get his heid cut aff: an’ there he was, sleepin’ peacefu’ an’ happylike—Oh, criftens! the kettle!”

Mr. Redhorn made but an indifferent supper. His dismal task weighed heavily upon him.

"I wisht she had askit somebody else," he said to himself again and again. "It's peetifu' to see hoo the puir beast trusts me—sleepin' there as if I was its best frien'."

He returned to his easy-chair, and tried to read the weekly paper. "I canna think o' estimates the noo," he sighed.

The clock on the wall struck eight.

"Fower 'oors yet!" he groaned, passing his hand over his thin hair.

He refilled the saucer. Pussy woke up, lapped a little of the milk, and sat down and blinked at the painter.

"Puir beastie!" he murmured.

Pussy jumped upon his knees, and settled there comfortably.

Mr. Redhorn flung away his paper and fell to stroking the white fur. Pussy purred blissfully. The painter could endure the situation no longer.

"I'm dashed if I'm gaun to droon ye!" he whispered.

For five minutes or so he felt better. Then difficult questions began to crop up.

"But what am I to dae wi' ye? I canna keep ye in the hoose for ever. Ye wudna bide. An' if I let ye oot, ye'll be recognized—an' ye're supposed to be droondit. An' ye wud rin awa' back to Miss Waldie's an' eat mair canaries; an' I wud never hear the end o' t,"

forbye lossin' the best job that's come ma road for sax month. It's a peety I canna pent ye an' disguise ye. But I read in a paper yinst that art has its leemitations. It's true as scripture! An' that black spot ower yer e'e is as bad as the brand o' Cain; it wud betray ye richt an' left. Ye're like the leopard, puir pussy, for ye canna change yer spot."

The cat continued to purr contentedly.

"But the question is: What am I to dae wi' ye?" Mr. Redhorn went on. "Ye're jist a—a white elephant, so ye are! That's it!—a white elephant! An' hoo I'm to keep ye safe till I can gang to the toon is a conundrum that wud ha'e gi'ed Solomon hissel' a sair heid."

He picked up the weekly paper and idly scanned the back page.

"Eh! what's this?" he exclaimed suddenly, sitting bolt upright so that the cat sprawled from his knee. He read eagerly.

"Criftens! What a notion! What an inspiration! But can I risk it?"

Ten minutes later he rose, and, admonishing the cat to "behave" during his absence, left the house. Outside the door he halted, peering through the darkness. Yes! there was still a light in the window of Mrs. Fergus's little shop. Perhaps she could help him.

On the following evening Mr. Redhorn waited upon Miss Waldie to return her basket and also to present his estimate.

“ Dear me! ” cried the lady. “ Your hands are simply covered with scratches. I had no idea that the cat was so fierce. I’m extremely sorry, Mr. Redhorn, to have given you such a task.”

“ Oh, never heed, mem,” said the painter humbly. “ I hope ye’ll find the estimate satisfactory.”

“ But how did you allow the cat to scratch you so dreadfully? ”

“ Weel, mem,” said Mr. Redhorn slowly, “ a’ cats ha’e a great objection to—to water o’ ony description, an’—an’ your cat, mem, was nae exception. But I’ve brocht ye a specimen o’ ma comet stencil,” and he handed Miss Waldie a roll of paper.

“ I’ll look at this and the estimate later, Mr. Redhorn,” she replied. “ The fact is, I am rather upset this evening. I have lost another canary. I thought my poor little birds were quite safe, now that the wicked creature was destroyed; but this afternoon, when I had left them for a moment—they were enjoying a little fly about the dining-room—a cat got in, somehow, through the conservatory, and killed my little Gwendoline.”

“ Wha did ye say, mem? ” stammered the painter.

“ Gwendoline was the poor canary’s name. Can *you* tell me, Mr. Redhorn, who owns a black cat in this neighbourhood? ”

Mr. Redhorn stroked his nose. “ I doot

there's mair nor yin black cat about here," he said, after consideration. "But I—I'll mak' inquiries, mem."

"Thank you. It is really too dreadful to think that my birds may never be out of danger. But I will not keep you longer. I shall send you word when I decide about the painting."

On reaching his abode Mr. Redhorn stepped inside rather cautiously and struck a match.

"Oh, ye're there, are ye?" he remarked to the cat lying on the rug. "I thocht ye had maybe ta'en a dislike to me." He lit the lamp and went over and closed the window.

He stirred the banked-up fire, made the usual preparations for his evening meal, and seated himself in the easy-chair.

"Eh! pussy," he said sadly, "but ye're a thenkless beast! Efter a' I gaed through for ye last nicht, ye sit there an' think o' naethin' but fire an' meat. Ye dinna deserve the bit haddie I've brocht ye—but I suppose ye'll ha'e to git it."

He spread a sheet of newspaper on the floor and laid the fish upon it. Puss went for it with a snarl of delight.

"Ay! that's a' ye can think o'," he resumed. "See ma haun's! What a scartin' an' bitin' ye gi'ed me, an me gettin' ye nice warm water an' het blanket a' ready for ye efter the operation. An' see the trouble ye're pittin' me to—no' to mention the expense! I'll ha'e to tak' ye to

the toon in the first boat the morn's mornin'. Ye're no' safe here, an' I'm no' safe either. I think I'll get ma auld frien's Maister an' Mistress Broon to tak' ye. They wud be kind to ony leevin' thing, frae a kangaroo to a puddock. My! what a mess ye're makin' wi' yer fish! Can ye no' eat it on the paper?"

Mr. Redhorn sighed. "But I'm gled ye're nane the waur o' the dookin' I gi'ed ye last nicht. Puir beast, ye couldna help bein' angry. But what a transformation! Hoo wondrous is the works o' Science! Last nicht, at this time, ye was white: noo; ye're black—black but comely! But tho' I changed yer skin, I couldna change yer nature an' keep ye frae the canaries. So ye've got to gang the morn, pussy. I—I wonder hoo lang the dye'll keep ye black. . . . But ye're better dyed nor deid."

III

THE INDEPENDENT VOTER

“**I**DINNA want to hear yer arguments, Danks. I’ve nae time to listen to ye. Ye’re no’ the first to bother me the day. Ma business for the present is to match a certain shade o’ sawmon-pink, an’ I find yer conversation mair distractin’ nor a bumbee in a Sawbath-schule. I never was what they ca’ a politeecian, an’ I’m no’ gaun to commence at ma time o’ life. Awa’ hame an’ talk to yer fish, if ye canna relieve yer mind itherwise. I mean nae offence—but I’m busy.”

Having thus delivered himself, Mr. Redhorn turned to the bench whereon stood sundry pots and cans, and proceeded to stir something as though he loved it.

The fishmonger continued to lean against the door of the shed, his thumbs hooked in the arm-holes of his waistcoat.

“There’s nae credit in *no’* bein’ a politeecian, Ridhorn. Eegnorance is *no’* a thing to be prood aboot,” he declaimed ponderously. “It’s the duty o’ every man to tak’ an intelligent interest in politics, espacially when there’s a crissis in the country.”

“It’s the duty o’ every man to pey attention to his business,—if he’s got ony. Them that ha’ena ony business are welcome to be politeecians.”

“As I was aboot to say,” continued Mr. Danks, ignoring the remark, “it’s the duty o’ every man to think o’ his country, an’ dae his best——”

“It’s no’ gaun to help ma country if I stan’ here gassin’ instead o’ peyin’ attention to——”

“——for to understan’ the questions afore the country an’ the electors. Noo, in the first place,” Mr. Danks proceeded, warming to his work, “we ha’e the question o’ the people agin——”

“Oh, man, man! Dinna stert harpin’ on that! I get plenty aboot that in ma paper every nicht. ‘Deed, there’s little else i’ the paper. I’m fair seeck o’ the subjec’. It’s the same auld story every time—yin pairty tryin’ to prove the ither pairty eediots an’ leears, an’ vice versa. Whiles I think they baith succeed.”

“But wait a bit, wait a bit! D’ye mind what Gladstone said aboot the Hoose of Lords?”

“I’ve nae doot it was something worth mindin’; an’ if ye’ll kindly write it doon on a bit paper, I’ll commit it to mem’ry when I’ve the leisure. I’ the meantime——”

“What!” cried the fishmonger, “ha’e ye nae interest in yer country?”

"Conseederable. I've been helpin' to beautify it for near forty year. But ma country has aye managed to thrive in spite o' the politeecians. Noo an' then a statesman has arose an' gi'ed it a shove furrit, but——"

Withdrawing his thumbs from his waist-coat, Mr. Danks clenched his right fist and smote his left palm.

"Let me tell ye this, Ridhorn!" he shouted; "let me tell ye this!——"

"What?"

"Let me tell ye this!—Ye're no worthy to ha'e a vote!"

"Criftens!" the painter ejaculated mildly; "what ha'e I done?"

"Ye dinna deserve to ha'e a stake in yer country's welfare. I challenge ye to declare what ye are!—Are ye a Leeberal or a Tory?"

"That's easy answered. Whiles I'm a true-blue Leeberal; whiles I'm a rid-hot Tory: an' whiles I'm a conglomeration. Jist at present, hooever, I'm a penter wi' a job on han', an' I wish ye wud depart frae ma presence, as the young ledgies say in the novelles."

"Wha are ye gaun to vote for?" the fish-monger persisted.

"Tits! Ye've made me pit in ower plenty yellow! Hoo wud ye like if I cain' into yer shop an' commenced the speechifyin' when ye was engaged in the delicate operation o' makin' an auld hen look like a spring chicken? Eh? Rin awa' an gi'e yer fish a drink an' yer poultry

a brush up, an' we'll resume wur conversation at a mair convenient season—after the election, maybe, when folk ha'e happily forgot the things they said an' wrote afore it."

The fishmonger's beard seemed to bristle. "Aha!" he cried, "ye're for shirkin' the truth, are ye? Ye daurna face the fac's! Ye wud try to pit me aff wi' a stupid joke, wud ye? Ye wud draw a rid herrin' across the path——"

"I wud draw a whale, if I thocht it wud stop ye."

"But let me tell ye this, Ridhorn, let me tell ye this!—the day afore yesterday at—at—weel, that's no' the p'int—onywey, the Chancellor said the country was up in arms, an' it was war to the knife. D'ye hear that?"

"I hear it," Mr. Redhorn replied wearily, stroking his nose and blinking his pale blue eyes. "I hear it—for the hundred an' twenty-third time. There's been a queer gush o' savage talk lately—drawin' o' swords, an' castin' awa' o' scabbards, etcetera. There maun be a lot o' scabbards lyin' aboot the country by this time, but it strikes me it's the sword-drawers that are the first to loss their heids. Criftens! I wonder at ye, Danks! I suppose ye've been at ower mony meetin's lately, an' ye've catched the fever. A poleetical meetin' noo an' then is a' richt, but there's nae use lettin' yer angry passions rise to b'ilin' p'int—unless ye've something worth the b'ilin'. It's no' guid for ye. I wud advise a lang drink o'

coolin' meddicine an' a stroll among the tombs."

Mr. Danks took a step forward, and again smote fist on palm.

"It's men like you that's the curse o' the country," he roared. "Ha'e ye nae honest views on the seetuation?"

"Aw, clay up, for ony favour!" groaned the painter. "I've plenty views, but I canna expound them the noo. Mistress Tolmie'll be thinkin' I'm no' gaun to feenish her paurlour the day."

"I believe ye're a blank Tory," said the fish-monger angrily. "Ye can think o' naethin' but yersel' an' yer ill-gotten gains. Yer country's naethin' to you. I've been wastin' *ma* time on ye."

Mr. Redhorn wheeled round, a dripping stick in his hand.

"Ye're richt there!" he said warmly. "Unfortunately, ye've been wastin' *ma* time likewise. An' forbye that, ye ha'ena spoke a word worth hearin'. Ye're jist a gas-bag—like hauf the speakers ye read aboot i' the papers. An', like yersel', they canna even manufacture their ain gas; they've got to get it frae the big gasometers at heidquarters; an' every nicht they turn on their bit taps, an' oot it flows, producin' conseederable heat, but unco sma' illumination. Awa', man, awa'! Awa' an' chase yersel'—roar at the cattle—eat grass—dae onything ye like—but dinna come pesterin' me wi'

yer unwelcome attentions! Ma vote's ma private property, an' so is ma intellec'. *Shift!*"

But even the unwonted spectacle of Joseph Redhorn thoroughly roused could not check the fishmonger then. In a supreme frenzy Mr. Danks flung his arms heavenwards, spat on the ground, and bellowed—

"Ye're a shuffler! Ye're a poltroon! Ye canna answer a stracht question! I believe ye wud knuckle doon to the Peers! But what does Burns say? I ask ye that! What does Burns say? 'A man's a man for—'"

"If ye can quote ony ither line frae Burns, Danks," said the painter, recovering himself, "I'll gi'e ye a saxpence."

"I wudna tich yer saxpence! Joseph Ridhorn, I denounce ye to yer teeth that ye're nae patriot! Ye wud sell yer country for a mess o' pottage. Ye wud—"

"Come in," said Mr. Redhorn, as a timid tap fell on the door.

A small girl with a large and rather dirty face entered, and in a breathless, piping voice, said—

"Please, Maister Danks, Mistress Forgie cam' to the shop, an' she was wantin' to ken what wey ye sent her fresh haddies an' her ordered finnans, an' she's rale angry, an' she says it's no' the first time it's happened, but it'll be the last, an' she's gaun to pey her accoont, an' get her fish frae the man at Ard-martin, an'—"

"Is she waitin' in the shop?" demanded the fishmonger anxiously.

"Ay, but—"

Mr. Danks bolted.

"Here, lassie!" Mr. Redhorn called after the retreating damsels; "there's something for ye." And he pressed a three-penny-bit into her hand.

In reply to her gape he added: "It's jist for shuttin' aff the gas, ma dear."

Once more Mr. Redhorn turned to the bench, but he was scarcely settled to the task in hand when his youthful apprentice dashed in.

"Oh, laddie!" muttered the painter, "can ye no' control yer commotions? What's ado? Ha'e ye feenished Miss Tolmie's coal-cellar door?"

"Naw; but she sent me to tell ye to hurry up an' feenish her paurlour, or she wud get anither penter to dae it, an' chairge ye for the inconvenience. Oh, she's in an awfu' rage, Maister Ridhorn. I think ye best come quick."

Mr. Redhorn groaned. "Preserve me frae the tongues o' angry females an' ardent politieecians! Tell her I'll be up in ten meenutes. I suppose it's nae use explainin' to her that I've been pestered since denner-time wi' chat-terin' eediots, includin' Danks, wantin' to ken what I was gaun to dae wi' ma vote. Haste ye, laddie, an' tell her the delay was unavoidable."

Willie hesitated. "I think I'll wait for ye, Maister Ridhorn," he said.

"Eh? . . . Is she as bad as that?"

"She was—she was jist *roarin'*."

"Aw!" Mr. Redhorn groaned again. "I wud as sune face a lion as her in yin o' her tantrums. Aweel, Wullie, we'll gi'e her time to blaw aff steam, an' then face her thegither. Had ye plenty pent for the door? Eh? Weel, ye best tak' thon extra pot, an' no' be rinnin' short an gi'ein' her anither excuse for lettin' her angry passions rise. When I was a youth," he continued more equably, "I had an aunt that used to say we sud aye coont ten afore we got angry—"

"It doesna tak' vera lang to coont ten," remarked Willie.

"True," the painter admitted. "But if ye was coontin' slow—"

"I yinst tried that to please ma granny, but the ither laddie handed me a bat on the nose afore I got to five."

Mr. Redhorn shook his head. "I doot ye're what the dictionary ca's flippant, Wullie. Get a sheet o' san'-paper oot the drawer, an' haud yer tongue."

"Wi' the san'-paper?"

"That's enough!" said the painter sternly. "I hope ye didna gi'e ony back-talk to Miss Tolmie."

"Nae fears! I never let on I heard her."

"I doot if that wud please her, either."

“I wudna try to please thon auld kangaroo.”

“Ah, but that’s no’ the proper speerit, ladie. Ye maun try to please the de’il hissel’,—if he happens to be yer customer. Noo, I’m near ready.”

“Wha are ye gaun to vote for, Maister Ridhorn?” Willie inquired.

“I near killed a man the day for that same question.”

“If I was you, I wud vote for Sir Erchie.”

“Wud ye? An’ what wey wud ye vote for Sir Erchie?”

“Because he bides near Fairport, an’ ye’ll maybe get a job frae him some day. Ye’ll never get a job frae Bullock, because he bides in London. Ye can see that wi’ a cork e’e stuffed wi’ shavin’s. If ye vote for Sir Erchie, I’ll get his boy in buttons to gi’e him the hint that ye done it. Eh?”

“Wullie, Wullie,” cried Mr. Redhorn, “ha’e ye never heard tell o’ the high moral principles o’ the free an’ independent voter?”

“Ye hear some queer things at election time. I dinna believe a’ I hear. But ye was sayin’ we sud aye try to please wur customers, supposin’ they was deevils——”

“But—but Sir Erchie isna a customer,” said Mr. Redhorn, unprepared for once.

“But I’ve heard he was a deevil in his young days,” said Willie, “and he wud be a customer worth the catchin’.”

"This is awfu'," muttered the painter. "We'd best be gettin' up the hill to Miss Tolmie's. Tak' yer tea wi' me the nicht, laddie—I've a wee tin o' sawmon, vera tasty!—an' I'll try to expound to ye the mystery o' the high moral principles o' the free an' truly independent voter."

"Thenk ye," said Willie; "I'm a demon for tinned sawmon."

They were nearing Miss Tolmie's abode when the boy gave vent to an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Thonder the meenister gaun in to veesit her," he explained. "She'll no' ha'e the face to rage at us efter that. Be sure ye let her ken that ye seen the meenister gaun in, afore she has time to open her mooth. Eh, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Laddie," said Mr. Redhorn, "if yer skill at the pentin' wud develop hauf as quick as yer worldly wisdom, I wud ha'e to conseedder raisin' yer wages."

"If she speirs wha ye're gaun to vote for, what'll ye say?" inquired Willie, as they entered the garden.

"That's a puzzler. I suppose she'll be favourin' yin o' the candidates."

"Ay, she's for the London chap. She was gi'ein' awa' tracts aboot him the ither day. Ye best let on ye're for him, so as we'll get pentin' the rest o' the hoose later on. It wud be a fine, big job. I—I can gi'e ye a bit rid

ribbon for yer button-hole, if ye like.” Willie fished something from his pocket. “Na!—that’s a blue bit. . . . Here the rid. It’ll save ye a lot o’ gassin’.”

“Wullie,” cried the painter in a shocked voice, “ha’e ye nae sense o’ honour? Dae ye mean to tell me ye carry baith colours, an’ ween the yin or the ither as suits——”

“I took the rid yin aff a chap last nicht,” the boy replied, unabashed, “but I thocht it micht come in handy noo—to please yer customer.”

“There’s a leemit to everything! Awa’ wi’ ye, an’ feenish the coal-cellar door! I’ve got some conscience left,” said Mr. Redhorn firmly.

But he almost wished he hadn’t, when, half an hour later, Miss Tolmie, after an unexpectedly brief reproof, administered a lengthy harangue on the virtue of being a Liberal, and finally presented him with a bundle of pamphlets and leaflets for perusal and distribution.

“Still, I didna commit masel’,” he said, not without some complacence, as he and his apprentice knocked off work for the day. “I didna state wha I was gaun to vote for. Mark that weel, Wullie! I flatter masel’ I was dignified forbye discreet.”

“But ye didna get an order for pentin’ the rest o’ the hoose. Ye got naethin’ but gas an’ a heap o’ tracts,” said Willie regretfully. “I

couldna help hearin' her through the winda," he added; "she's got a v'ice like a corn-crake. Ye sud ha'e wore than bit rid ribbon in yer button-hole, Maister Ridhorn."

"I hope by the time ye ha'e a vote, laddie, ye'll ha'e a conscience likewise. But I prefer no' to discuss the subjec' furder in the meantime. Ye might rin into Mistress Fergus's an' speir if she's feenished wi' ma tin-opener."

The salmon was heartily appreciated by the youthful guest, but the host, being threatened with his old enemy dyspepsia, turned from the dainty with a sigh.

"I've had a surfeit o' mental excitement the day," he explained. "When ye're aulder, ye'll maybe discover that the intellec' whiles interferes wi' the inside. It's the penalty o' being a thinker. There's mony a genius wud gi'e up his hopes o' statues an' biographies for a guid feed o' tinned sawmon—if he could eat the sawmon wi'oot subsequently feelin' as if he had ett the tin forbye."

"Are *you* a genius, Maister Ridhorn?" the apprentice inquired, with his mouth full.

"Pey attention to yer—yer repast," the painter returned. He sipped his tea meditatively for the next minute or so. "Noo I'll expound to ye the mystery o' the high moral—"

A loud knocking at the door interrupted him. "Come in," he cried crossly.

A trio of young men in their Sunday garments entered.

“Fine nicht,” said one. “I suppose ye’re gaun to vote for Sir Erchie the morn, Ridhorn.”

“Tits! Can a man no’ get takin’ his tea in peace?”

“Aw, keep yer hair on, Joseph. When wud ye like the motor to ca’ for ye to assist ye to the poll?”

“Thenk ye; but I’ll manage to the poll on ma twa feet.”

“It’s handy ha’ein’ feet,” said the young man, who had the reputation of wit in the village, “but shoe leather costs money. Nae use in trampin’ three mile, if——”

“I didna say I was gaun to vote for Sir Erchie,” began Mr. Redhorn.

Whereat the three young men fell upon him with arguments.

At the end of ten minutes Mr. Redhorn banged the table with his fist. “If ye dinna clear oot instanter,” he cried, “I’ll—I’ll clear oot masel’.”

After some more wrangling the visitors departed, disputing amongst themselves as to the proper way of spelling “doubtful,” which word the leader was desirous of noting on his canvasser’s list against the painter’s name.

“If I was you,” observed Willie, helping himself to more jam, “I wud vote for baith chaps, an’ please everybody.”

Mr. Redhorn hesitated ere he cried—"Criftens, laddie! D'ye no' understand that the ballot box is as secret as the tomb?"

"I'm no' like a tomb. I could tell the red folk that ye voted red, an' the blue folk that ye voted blue—an' it wud be the truth! Eh? Are ye on, Maister Ridhorn?"

Mr. Redhorn regarded his apprentice with something akin to horror, and was about to administer a lecture which would doubtless have been memorable, when another knock fell on the door, and, without waiting for an invitation, a second deputation admitted itself.

It was headed by Mr. Danks, the fishmonger, who in a tone meant to be jocular, shouted: "Weel, Ridhorn, in the hope that ye've come to yer senses, we've come to get yer pledge. It's aye satisfactory to be on the winnin' side, ye ken, an' that's this side!"

Mr. Redhorn, noticing that the boy had finished eating, gave him a sign to retire, which was readily enough accepted, Willie having a warm antipathy to the fishmonger. Then the painter removed himself to the shabby easy-chair, lit a cigarette and said wearily—

"Turn on the gas, Danks, turn on the gas."

It took nearly half an hour to exhaust the deputation's enthusiasm, and when at last it took its departure, irritated to a high pitch, Mr. Redhorn realized that he had a headache. He would have sought relief in a brisk walk

in the evening air, but knew he could not do so without encountering rabid politicians.

"I'll keep them on tenter-hooks till the last meenute the morn's nicht," he said to himself. "I'll tak' care to arrive at the poll jist afore it closes." Having come to this happy conclusion, he locked and bolted the door, selected a penny novelette from his store, and went to bed.

Next day he contrived to escape the attentions of the opposing committees by the simple expedient of going without his dinner—remaining at work at Miss Tolmie's house until evening. He was, however, extremely annoyed by the non-appearance of Willie all the afternoon. "He'll be awa' to see if there's ony fun at the poll, the rascal," he reflected; "pleesure afore business is aye his motto, though a body wud think frae his conversation o' yesterday that he pit business afore everything."

Shortly after six o'clock Mr. Redhorn ran the gauntlet for home. There he dressed himself in his best, made a hasty meal, and smoked a cigarette while he watched the clock carefully. At the minute which he had appointed he left the house. "Noo to mystify the curious public!" he remarked to himself, with a smirk of self-satisfaction. The village was practically deserted; every male, at least, having gone to the polling station.

A couple of furlongs along the road Mr.

Redhorn's visage took on a somewhat hard expression. The sight of the cottage, wherein Willie dwelt with his widowed mother, reminded him of the former's delinquency. But not for any reward would he have "given away" his apprentice by calling to make inquiries. Indeed, he was startled when the widow spoke to him from the doorway.

"Could ye spare a meenute, Maister Ridhorn? Wullie is rale anxious to see ye. He's got hurt," she continued as the painter drew nearer.

"Hurt!" Mr. Redhorn's tone was one of great concern. "Hoo did he get hurt, puir laddie? Surely I'll come in an' see him."

"I doot he's been fechtin'," said Mrs. McWattie in a low voice. "I'm sure I'm gled the election's near bye. But step in, Maister Ridhorn. Wullie's vexed he couldna gang to his wark efter dinner, but he was in a sair state. He's in his bed."

The unfortunate youth was indeed in a woe-ful plight—head bandaged, eye discoloured, nose swollen, lip cut.

"Oh!" cried Mr. Redhorn in dismay, "what ha'e ye been daein', Wullie, ma lad?"

"The election," said Willie, and began to apologize. His mother discreetly retired.

"Never heed aboot that. Tell me what hurt ye, an'—"

"I got the best o' it wi' Peter Shaw," said Willie. "I focht him first."

“But what for did ye fecht him? What was the quarrel aboot?”

“He said ye was a blank Tory, Maister Ridhorn.”

“Aw! . . . An’ ye focht aboot that?”

“Ay—an’ I bate him. But a wee while efter I met Bob M’Fee . . . but he was ower big for me.”

“But what set ye fechtin’ wi’ Bob?”

“He said ye was a rank Leeberal.”

Mr. Redhorn smote his brow. “I—I dinna understan’ ye, laddie,” he said feebly.

“Weel, ye see, I wasna gaun to let chaps say ye was what ye wasna, an’ I dinna ken what ye was, an’ so I jist had to——”

“Oh, me!” exclaimed the painter, “was ever sic loyalty as this! But ye shouldna ha’e focht for me. I dinna ken what to say to ye, but I—I’ll tak’ ye to the menagerie an’ circus that’s comin’ next week.”

“Jings! that’ll be fine! I wisht I had knockit the face aff M’Fee.”

“Whisht, laddie! Ye maun promise me to fecht nae mair. Wull ye?”

Willie gave the promise rather unwillingly. “But what are ye, Maister Ridhorn?”

“Me?” The painter hesitated.

“Wha did ye vote for?”

“I’m jist on ma road to the poll.” Suddenly Mr. Redhorn looked at his watch. “Tits!” he cried, “I’m ower late for the poll. I couldna dae it if I was to rin.”

"That's a peety."

"Ay, it's a peety—but it canna be helpit, laddie." Nevertheless Mr. Redhorn looked disappointed.

"Wha was ye gaun to vote for?"

Mr. Redhorn hesitated. Then he bent to the boy.

"I'll tell ye a secret. I was gaun to the poll, but I was gaun to pit the ticket in the boax wi'oot markin' it. For ye see, I'm—I'm an *Independent*."

There was a longish silence.

"D'ye understan', Wullie? I'm an *Independent*," Mr. Redhorn repeated proudly.

"Ay," said Willie, "I see. But—but what's the use o' bein' that?"

IV.

HOSPITALITY

IT was so cold that Mr. Redhorn, on opening the door, sneezed for a full minute ere he could utter a word.

An old man, a very old man, stood on the step. The moonlight fell on him, showing up his bowed shoulders, his wrinkled face with its white fringe beard, and his gnarled hands which he was rubbing together.

He peered up in the painter's face, and chuckled hoarsely.

"Criftens!" exclaimed Joseph, when speech became possible; "is that you, John McNab? Come ben oot the cauld."

"Aw, I'm fine here," said the old man. "I was jist passin', an' I thocht I wud gi'e a chap at yer door to wish ye a guid New Year—when it comes. But I'll no come ben—"

"Tits, man! Come ben this meenute. Ye'll get yer daith o' cauld staun'in' there, an' so will I." He took the old man by the arm and assisted him over the threshold. "I'm gled to see ye, John," he continued, shutting the door and leading his visitor, who went most willingly, towards the fire. "But I'm surprised

at ye bein' oot on sic a cruel nicht, though the roads is guid an' dry. . . . Sit ye doon. Tak' the easy-chair."

"Thenk ye; thenk ye." Mr. McNab seated himself with much deliberation, and, holding his hands to the fire, resumed chafing them. "But I'm tellin' ye I had nae intention o' disturbin' ye the nicht. I was jist passin', an' I thocht I wud gi'e a chap at yer door to wish—"

"Jist that, jist that," the painter interrupted gently. "I'm greatly oblieged to ye for yer guid wishes in advance. An' they're no' that muckle in advance either, for this is the second last nicht o' the auld year."

"An' it's ma birthday!" said Mr. McNab, with another chuckle and a glance round the room.

"D'ye tell me that?"

"Ay! I'm ninety year auld the day," said the old man impressively. His eyes rested on a cupboard.

"My! that's a noble age! Ye're a reg'lar patriarch! But ye dinna look it, John. Naebody wud tak' ye for the auldest inhabitant, as the sayin' is, o' Fairport."

"But I *am* the auldest inhabitant, for a' that Mistress Baxter says aboot hersel' bein' a year aulder. She canna prove it." Mr. McNab spoke warmly.

Mr. Redhorn hastened to divert his visitor's thoughts from Mistress Baxter. "Aboot hoo

auld dae ye feel ye are, John?" he inquired, with an air of interest.

"No' a day mair nor saxty," Mr. McNab promptly replied. Thereupon he was seized with a severe fit of coughing. "That hoast o' mine's commenced when I was saxty," he said, on recovering his breath. "It's no' a sign o' auld age in ma case."

"But ye sud tak' care o' it," said Mr. Redhorn. "Nae doot," he added hastily, "it's a fine thing to ha'e had the same hoast for thirty year. An' hoo's the guidwife the nicht, John? Was she no' anxious aboot ye gaun oot?"

Mr. McNab forgot about his cough. He leaned towards Mr. Redhorn, chuckled, winked both eyes, and said—

"She didna ken I was gaun oot." He chuckled and winked again.

Joseph forced a feeble smile. "Hoo did ye manage it?" he said.

"Weel, ye see, the wife got a fine ploom puddin' frae the Miss Lavendars', an' we had some o' 't to wur suppers. An' efter that, we sat doon afore the fire—an' it was an extra big fire, for we had got hauf-a-ton o' coals frae Sir Erchie—an' Marget fell asleep. I had a bit nap masel', but no' for lang; an' when I woke up, there was Marget as soun' as a top. So I got the haud o' ma buits—she had hid them in the grandfayther's nock when she thocht I wasna lookin'—an' I pit them on as quate as a moose. An' then I got ma coat an'

hat—the hat was inside the great big pat she used to mak' the parritch in, when a' the bairns was wi' us—an' then I pit ma slippers saftly in her lap, an' cam' awa'." Mr. McNab ended his little recital with a chuckle which developed into a cough.

"I hope she'll no' be upset when she waukens," said Mr. Redhorn seriously.

Mr. McNab had the grace to lower his eyes.

"Hoots!" he cried, with an effort at recklessness. "A man canna be aye tied to a wumman's apron strings. He maun ha'e his—his fling, espaycially at the New Year. Eh, Joseph?"

The argument hardly appealed to Mr. Redhorn. At the same time he shrank from hurting the old fellow's feelings. "I daursay," he said slowly, "I daursay I'm maybe ower young to—to appreciate yer—poseetion, John, but—"

"Ye've no' been kep' i' the hoose every nicht since the simmer," said Mr. McNab.

"That's true enough," said Joseph. "I've naebody to keep me."

"But hoo wud ye like to be kep' i' the hoose, jist as if ye was a wean?"

The painter evaded the question. "It's nateral for Mistress McNab to want to tak' care of ye."

"Weel, it's no' nateral for me to want to be ta'en care o'," was the somewhat rebellious reply. "A man maun ha'e his fling, I tell ye,

a man maun ha'e his fling. But if I'm no' welcome here, I'll gang," he said abruptly, making as if to rise. "I didna intend to disturb ye the nicht, but I was jist passin', an' I thocht——"

"Rest ye, rest ye!" exclaimed Mr. Redhorn. "Wha said ye wasna welcome? I jist wish ye had brocht the guidwife wi' ye. Wud ye try a sup o' ginger wine this cauld nicht? I sud ha'e thocht o' that afore this." He rose and went to the cupboard whereon the old eyes had rested.

Mr. McNab brightened at once; his countenance positively beamed; he rubbed his hands expectantly. But he spoke coldly enough.

"Ginger wine? Humph! . . . Aweel, I'll tak' a taste, if it's handy—jist for comp'ny's sake, ye ken."

"It'll be guid for the puddin', onywey," remarked the host, as he set the bottle and two old-fashioned thick-stemmed glasses on the table. "It's a powerfu' digestive, is ginger wine. . . . Ha'e!" he passed a brimming glass to his visitor. "Here's to ye!" he raised the other glass to his lips.

The old man nodded, and took a sip. His face flushed. "It's warmin', onywey," he said.

"Oh, it's a comfortin' beverage when the thermometer's ablow zero, as the weather prophets say," returned Joseph. "It's better nor speerits when ye're gaun oot in the cauld.

It'll keep ye cosey for yer hameward journey, John," he added casually, without looking at his guest.

The latter did not appear to notice the remark. He sipped his wine quickly until the glass was empty. Then he lay back in his chair and puffed gratefully. "It's no' a bad drink," he admitted at last.

"Weel, it'll keep ye cosey for yer hameward journey," said Joseph again.

"It doesna seem to be jist as warmin' as the stuff ye had last year." Mr. McNab gazed at his empty glass with a critical eye.

"D'ye think no' ? It's the same brand ; but, of course, it might be a different vintage," said the painter. "I've read that wines varies conseederable wi' the years o' their vintage."

"Ay ; vera likely. . . . Eh—thae's vera genteel glasses ye've got, Joseph."

"Genteel? Hoo that?"

"Oh, I mean to say they're like the glasses that the gentry uses for a stert—wi' the soup, ye ken—jist a bit nip to begin wi'—vera nate glasses o' a sma' size."

"I—I see," said Mr. Redhorn slowly. Then he uncorked the bottle. "Maybe ye wud like anither drappie—afore ye stert on yer hameward journey."

With cheerful alacrity the visitor held out his glass. "See what a steady haun' I've got, Joseph," he said with ingenuous pride. "Ye can fill the gless to the vera tap, an' I wudna

skale a drap. Sit doon, Joseph, an gi'e's yer crack. I hope ye'll ha'e a happy New Year."

"Thenk ye, John. The same to you, an' mony o' them. Er—I was thinkin' I wud gi'e ye a convoy on yer—yer hameward journey."

"I'll be gled o' yer comp'ny. But there's nae hurry for takin' ye oot in the cauld. I'm fine here. Draw in yer chair. Fill up yer gless. A man maun ha'e his fling, espaycially at the New Year."

Mr. Redhorn suppressed a groan, and seated himself opposite to his guest.

"It doesna tak' a great deal, efter a', to mak' a Happy New Year," observed the visitor, becoming optimistic under the glowing influence of his second glass.

"No' a great deal," replied the host, unable to deny himself a little philosophical conversation. "In ma opeenion the foondations o' New Year happiness are heat an' meat." He placed a shovel of coals on the fire. "Heat an' meat! I defy ony human bein' to commence the New Year happy wi' cauld feet an' naething to digeest—"

"An' nae ginger wine," put in Mr. McNab, chuckling at his empty glass. "A man maun ha'e his fling, ye ken. . . . Thenk ye! Yer health, Joseph! For a teetotal drink, this isna bad."

"Ye'll feel the benefit on yer hameward journey," said Joseph, becoming once more un-

comfortable as he thought of the distracted old woman in the little cottage, quarter of a mile away.

"I hope ye've had a guid year o' tred," said Mr. McNab pleasantly. "Man, I mind fine when ye set up in Fairport. Ay, I mind the day ye pit up yer sign. An' I said to masel'— 'There a young man that'll dae weel an' be a credit to Fairport.' 'Deed, ay! I said that, Joseph, as shair as I'm sittin' here."

And he rambled on.

At ten o'clock Mr. Redhorn became desperate. He went to the window and looked out.

"I doot it's gaun to be snaw sune," he said to his visitor. "Yer guidwife wud be awfu' anxious if ye was oot in the snaw. . . . But maybe ye could manage hame afore it comes. I'll gi'e ye a convoy."

"Hoots! I'm no' feart for snaw. The wife'll be sleepin' yet. Dinna fash yersel', Joseph. Ye're awfu' quate the nicht. Sit doon again an' gi'e's yer crack."

Mr. Redhorn shook his head. "I dinna want to hurry ye, John, but I canna thole the thocht o' her wonderin' whaur ye are. If ye like I'll step alang an' tell her ye're here, an' promise to see ye hame later on. Ye can sit here yersel' till I come back. Wull that dae?"

"That's no' a bad notion," said Mr. McNab cheerfully. "Jist tell her I'm enjeyin' masel', an' I'll be hame sometime. Tell her no' to fash

hersel'. I ken hoo to tak' care o' masel'. A man maun ha'e his fling."

Joseph got into his coat and put his cap on in silence. The frivolity of ninety was too much for him.

"I'll be back sune," he said, opening the door.

"Richt ye are!" cried his visitor jovially.

Just outside of his house Mr. Redhorn came face to face with Mrs. McNab.

"Oh, I doot ye've had a sair time," he said regretfully. "I was jist comin' to tell ye yer man was safe at ma fireside, Mistress McNab."

"An' I was jist comin' to tak' him hame," briskly replied the old woman with the big shawl round her head and shoulders.

"Did ye ken he was at ma hoose?"

"Fine! D'ye think he wud get oot his ain hoose wi'oot me kennin' whaur he was gaun? I followed him till I seen him safe inside yer door, an' then I gaed across the road an' had a crack wi' Mistress McDonald. Her laddie was watchin' in case John left ye afore I was ready."

"But ye didna ken that he was comin' to ma hoose when he stertit?"

"Oh, I had a pretty guid notion. He's been talkin' for a week aboot the nice ginger wine ye gi'ed him last New Year, so I guessed what he was efter. But ye'll excuse an auld man, Maister Ridhorn," she added gently.

"'Deed, ay! Ninety's a great age," said the painter kindly.

"Weel, he's no' jist as auld as that, but he'll be eighty-fower come June, an' I hope he'll see ninety yet."

"Gang ben," said Mr. Redhorn, opening the door.

They came upon Mr. McNab in the act of charging his glass. He spilled some of the wine.

"Wha tell't ye I was here?" he asked, not quite boldly.

"Och, I kent fine ye was here, John." The little old woman laughed quietly. "If it hadn't been a fine, dry nicht, ye wudna ha'e gotten oot. But ye'll be ready for the road noo. Pit on this gravat, an' we'll gang." She handed him a huge woollen muffler which she had been carrying under her shawl.

Mr. Redhorn interposed. "Wud ye tak' a taste o' ginger wine, Mistress McNab?"

"Na, na: thenk ye a' the same. It's time John an' me was hame." She took the old man by the arm, tenderly. "I hope ye've no' had ower plenty ginger wine, John," she said jokingly. "Ye've been gaun yer mile the nicht! But I suppose a man maun ha'e his fling. Eh, Maister Ridhorn?"

Mr. Redhorn laughed awkwardly.

"Whaur did ye hear that, Marget?" Mr. McNab demanded in a quavering voice. Was it possible that his wife had been listening at the door?

"I heard ye whusperin' it when ye was get-

tin' yer buits oot the nock, an' I was feart at first it was the Hielan' fling ye was efter. . . . But I daursay ye could dae the Hielan' fling weel enough, John." Her smile was flattering.

Mr. McNab looked childishly pleased.

"I daursay he could," said Joseph, with an involuntary glance at the depleted bottle.

He watched them walk away, arm in arm, in the moonlight.

"Weel, weel," he reflected, "I'm gled she wasna anxious, an' I jist hope the auld man had suffeecient puddin' to coonteract a' thon ginger wine."

V

AFFLICITION

A CAULD i' the heid," remarked Mr. Redhorn, in sad and sodden tones, "is maybe no' a deidly complaint, but, like sea-seeckness, it whiles gars the sufferer wish it wud ha'e a speedy an' fatal termination. As regairds masel', a cauld i' the heid is the shupreme acme o' meesery. For sheer discomfort a cauld i' the heid is worth twa i' the kist—that's what a gentleman yinst said to me. I was pittin' a dado on his paurlour—it's an auld story noo—an' I sneezed in the midst o' executin' a conventional comet, wi' the result that the comet's tail fledg aff in the wrang direction, clean ootside the dado, an' awa' up the nice new pentit wa'. I tell ye, I was affrontit—"

"What colour was the comet, Maister Ridhorn?" inquired Willie, with his mouth full.

"Ye pey attention to the eatin', Wullie," the painter replied, "an' I'll attend to the conversation. It's a' I'm fit for, wi' a cauld i' the heid. Tak' plenty o' jeely. There's mair in the press when that's feenished. Dinna be backward in comin' furrit, laddie," he added, with a kindly though distorted smile.

Willie followed the pleasant advice, while his master buried his face in a large handkerchief.

Presently Mr. Redhorn resumed—

“I thocht I was gaun to sneeze ma heid aff that time,” he said regretfully, “an’ behold! the sneeze changed its mind, as it were. That’s yin o’ the horrors o’ a cauld i’ the heid: it’s aye the unexpectit that happens. ‘Noo it’s comin’! ye say to yersel’, an’ ye lay doon yer pot an’ brush, an’ prepare for the shock. An’ ye wait in vain, like the young leddies in the novelles. Then, efter wastin’ twa-three meenutes o’ yer employer’s, or yer ain, time—accordin’ to the quality o’ yer conscience—ye get back to yer job. An’ suddenly it comes upon ye like a typhoon, an’ ye——”

“What’s a typhoon?”

“It’s a Chinese storm, Wullie, that catches ships unawares, an’ whiles destroy them.”

“But a sneeze wudna destroy onybody.”

“I was speakin’ metaphorically,” said Mr. Redhorn, with dignity.

His apprentice gaped for a moment, then applied himself to his bread and jelly.

“Some day,” the painter continued, “ye’ll maybe learn the art o’ speakin’ metaphorically. In the meantime, ye best pey attention to yer supper. In the event o’ me sayin’ something ye dinna understaun’, ye’ll favour me greatly by lettin’ it pass, or takin’ a mental note o’ the question for a mair convenient season. It’s a relief to me to talk, but it’s onything but a

relief to think, when I've a cauld i' the heid. I suppose the cauld stupefies the brain, though it doesna entirely paralyze the vocal organ. The present condeetion o' ma heid is no' easy to describe, but it might be compared to the kettle on the hob thonder. Het an' wat within: het an' dry withoot."

"D'ye mean that yer nose is like the stroop, Maister Ridhorn?" Willie was quite unable to resist putting the query.

For a moment the painter eyed his apprentice.

Willie's eyes danced, and fell.

"There's mony a true word spoke in jest," said Mr. Redhorn seriously. "Wi'oot intendin' it, ye askit a scienteeific question, Wullie. Ye ask if ma nose is like the stroop o' the kettle. An', speaking metaphorically, I reply in the affirmative. As the stroop is to the bilin' kettle so is the nose to the cauldit heid! Ay! The stroop acts as a safety valve as well as bein' useful an' ornamental. The nose acts the same. Wi'oot a nose a cauld i' the heid wud be unendurable. I used to think the nose merely addit to the meesery, but I see noo that for the sake o' the brain, at ony rate, the nose is a necessity. Fancy if ye had to sneeze *inside* yer heid!" Mr. Redhorn became silent at the bare thought.

"But if ye had nae nose, maybe ye wudna get the cauld in yer heid," remarked Willie, on recovering from a fit of choking.

"If 'ifs' an' 'ans' was pots an' pans, there wud be nae use for tinkers," his master quoted solemnly. "I got ma current cauld at the kirk surree last Friday nicht. I got it wi' eatin' a cookie in a draught. I felt the draught on the neap o' ma neck. What had ma nose to dae wi' it? That's hoo I got ma current cauld, Wullie."

"But there's nae currants in cookies, Mais-ter Ridhorn. Was it no' a bun? But hoo could currants gi'e ye—"

Mr. Redhorn opened his mouth to speak, but was attacked by a long and violent fit of sneezing.

"There, ye see, laddie," he said at last, wiping his eyes, "it catched me unawares, jist like the typhoon. What was ye speirin' aboot when I was catched?"

Willie decided not to repeat his query. "Can ye no' get a cure for yer cauld?" he inquired, helping himself to more bread.

Mr. Redhorn raised his cup, and set it down again.

"A cure! I daursay I could get a billion cures! I'm seeck o' cures. I've tried dizzens wi'oot result. The only cure for a cauld i' the heid is patience an' pocket-hankies. I've tried peels, poothers, an' bottles. I've tried a patient snuff that liftit me aff ma chair. I've tried sniffin' stuff they ca' eucalyptis till I couldna tell the difference atween paraffin an' terpen-tine: I filled the lamp with the latter, an' had

a narra escape. I've tried pepper—highly recommendit by Miss Waldie; but the next time I want to copiously weep, I'll try an onion. Criftens! What ha'e I no' tried? I've tried alcoholic beverages o' various sorts, but a' I can say is that they was comfortin' for the time bein'. John McVitie advised me to tak' hot rum—feech! I discovered later on that John tak's hot rum a' the year roon'. I've tried hot jeely-water—aweel, it remindit me o' ma auld mither, an' that was a pleesanter thocht nor ony I got frae ither cures."

"I've got jeely-water frae ma mither," observed the boy. "It's guid."

"Weel, weel," said the painter gently, "I wudna say it's no' a cure for juvenile caulds. Dootless it cured me when I got it frae ma mither. It was a treat onywey. But nooadays I've jist the yin cure, a'ready mentioned. I catch a cauld every April and every October. There seems to be nae means o' preventin' it. It maun be ma nature, I suppose. An' when it's yer nature, a' the flannen an' cork-soles in the warld'll avail ye naething. When I observe the trees buddin', I ken what's comin'. When I perceive the leaves drappin', I accept the sign as a warnin'. I try to feenish ony job I happen to be at, so as I can get three days in the hoose, alane wi' ma sufferin'."

Here Mr. Redhorn patiently endured a "typhoon," whilst his apprentice regarded him not without concern.

"Phoo! that was a hurricane!" the painter gasped.

"Does it hurt ye?" asked the boy.

"Next door to it. . . . However, I was gaun to gi'e ye a bit o' serious advice, when I was interruptit. Never try to pent a ceilin' when ye've a cauld i' the heid—that is to say, unless ye can dae a back-fa' wi' impunity. An' even then ye canna dae justice to the ceilin'. Avoid paper-hangin' an' attic when ye've a cauld i' the heid, for ye're shair to loss yer temper when ye come to the wee corners: an' loss o' temper means loss o' judgment, which means loss o' tred. In fac', wi' a cauld i' the heid, ye sud never attemp' onything o' a fancy nature. I'm positive nane o' the Auld Maisters pentit picturs wi' caulds i' their heids; an' if they did, they could aye pent ower the bad bit, or scrape it oot, when they got better. But ye canna play tricks like that at the hoose pentin', paper-hangin', and decoratin'. Na! it's a serious tred. An' ye get nae sympathy—nane whatever."

Mr. Redhorn paused a while, then continued—

"Sympathy for a cauld i' the heid exists only in the bosom o' a mither—or maybe a wife—I canna speak o' connubial affairs. Yer frien's'll mak' yer brain reel wi' descriptions o' coontless cures, but they'll no' disturb theirsels. As for yer patrons, I've nae doot they wud disturb theirsels gey conseederable, if

ye replied to a complaint by sayin' ye had had a cauld i' the heid when ye was at the job. They wud probably ask ye if the cauld had come oot a bottle in the first place. Na! there's nae sympathy to be had for a cauld i' the heid, Wullie."

Mr. Redhorn relapsed into a melancholy silence.

Willie ate steadily for a couple of minutes, glancing now and then at his master.

"Mair jeely, Wullie?" said the painter at last.

"Na. I'm done, thenk ye," the boy returned, wiping his mouth.

"Weel, ye'll be wantin' to get oot an' see yer frien's noo, I presume," said Mr. Redhorn. "Dinna wait, Wullie. I'm gled to ha'e had yer comp'ny, laddie. Thenk ye for comin' to speir for me. There's maybe some sympathy i' the warld, efter a'. Awa' wi' ye!"

"But I'm to bide here till ma mither comes."

"Yer mither?"

"Ay: she said she wud come alang to see if ye needit onything. I think she's gaun to mak' ye some jeely-water," Willie laughed. "She mak's it rale nice," he added.

It was, perhaps, the advent of another typhoon which caused the painter to get so red in the face.

When the storm had passed—

"Chape snuff!" he cried, quite cheerfully.

VI

A LITERARY REPUTATION

“**S**WEAR that you will be mine, Aurora,” hoarsely cried Sir Marmaduke, “or, as Heaven is above us, I will plunge this——”

“Tits!” muttered Mr. Redhorn, as a knock fell on the door. “Wha’s wantin’ me at this time o’ nicht?”

He withdrew his stockinged feet from the fender, placed them in his old slippers, rose unwillingly, and shuffled to the door, retaining his grasp on the pink-covered novelette.

“Wha’s there?” he asked, without turning the handle. “It’s past ten, an’ I’m——”

“Me,” a husky voice replied. “Alexander Pettigrew. I want to see ye for a meenute—on business.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Redhorn, and opened the door without delay. “Ye’re surely workin’ late the nicht,” he added, peering at a wheelbarrow beside which his visitor was standing.

“Ay,” returned Mr. Pettigrew, with something like a snigger.

“Come in,” said Joseph hospitably.

Mr. Pettigrew pushed the barrow into the shadow of the wall, and accepted the invita-

tion in silence. He tripped over the doorstep, but recovered himself, and presently stood by the hearth, blinking in the lamplight. He was a little man, very stout, bearded and bald-headed, with rather a foolish face.

“Sit ye doon, Alexander.” The painter pushed forward a chair.

Mr. Pettigrew nodded and sat down as if he felt he did not deserve a seat.

“It’s a cauld nicht,” he remarked, with an effort.

“It is that,” Mr. Redhorn returned, taking his own chair. “Bad for folks wi’ chilblains.”

There was a silence of perhaps a minute.

“It’s awfu’ dark on the road,” observed the visitor to the kettle on the hob.

“Ay, but we’ll be gettin’ the moon next week,” said the painter cheeringly. “Hoo’s tred wi’ ye?”

The little man sighed and shifted uneasily on his seat. “I was sayin’ I had come to see ye on—on business,” he said, after some hesitation.

“Jist that! Ye’ll be wantin’ an estimate, maybe. Is’t the hoose or the shed?”

Mr. Pettigrew sighed again. “It—it wasna exac’ly a—an estimate I was wantin’,” he said to a physic bottle on the mantelpiece. “I wud like fine to get the hoose pentit—an’ the shed wud be the better o’ a coat to keep the wudd frae rottin’—but—but pentin’ costs money.”

“But it’s worth it,” Mr. Redhorn returned quickly, his professional instincts now fully

awake. He stuffed the pink-covered novelette into his pocket.

"Ye're fond o' the readin', I see," said the visitor, with a faint, nervous snigger. "Ye've a great reputation for readin'?"

"Oh, ay. Noo an' then; jist noo an' then. But I was sayin' that pentin's worth the money—I mean guid pent properly applied. Noo, if ye'll excuse me mentionin' it, Alexander, that hoose o' yours was needin' pentin' when ye cam' to Fairport three year back, an' I preshume it's still needin' the same. Time works wonders, nae doot, but it draws the line at improvin' the appearance o' a paurlour or ither appartement, espaycially when there's weans in the hoose. Hoo mony weans ha'e ye gotten noo, Alexander?"

"Seeven," Mr. Pettigrew replied, suppressing a groan.

"The perfec' number," said Mr. Redhorn. "An' a vera satisfactory number frae a penter's p'int o' view," he added, laughing. "Ha'e ye ony paper left on the wa' near the floor?"

But the visitor did not respond to the host's jocularity.

"I wish I had never came to Fairport," he muttered bitterly. "There isna room for twa sclaters in this place."

Mr. Redhorn looked astonished.

"As for chimney-sweepin'," the other continued, "it's no' fashionable here. I suppose it's chaper to set fire to an auld newspaper

an' stap it up the vent. There sud be a fine for settin' lums on fire here, the same as in the toon. But even the policeman had his on fire the week afore last; I seen him admirin' the show frae the pier-heid, instead o' watchin' for suspeecious characters comin' aff the boat."

"Weel, weel, it's rale aggravatin'," soothingly replied Mr. Redhorn, who always left the cleaning of his chimney to nature. "I admit ye ha'e a grievance, for I ken hoo I feel when I see folk trying to pent their ain hooses. There's evidently amatures at mair nor pentin'. But ye mauna be doon-hertit, Alexander—unless, weel—Ye're no troubled wi' dyspepsia, are ye?" he asked suddenly.

"Na, na. It's no' that. But—"

"Aweel, if it's no' that, ye sudna be doon-hertit. Patience, man! Rome wasna built in a day, as the sayin' is, an' ye canna expec' to build up a fortune at the sclater's, or ony ither tred, in twa-three year. I think ye've done rale weel as faur as ye've gaun, an' noo that his lordship has startit to feu richt an' left, yer prospects is gey rosy. Ye're boun' to get yer share o' the wark."

Mr. Pettigrew stared gloomily at the fire, and remained dumb. Mr. Redhorn began to wonder what the "business" referred to at the outset could be about. The clock pointed to half-past ten.

"I hope Mistress Pettigrew's haudin' weel," the painter remarked politely, at last.

"Ay; she keeps wonderfu' weel," the slater replied in a heavy tone. He began to finger his whiskers. "Ye—ye was sayin' ye was fond o' the readin'," he said abruptly.

"Ay. So—so," admitted the host. "A single man needs something for the lang nicths. Are ye——?"

"Is't the truth ye're fondest o' readin' aboot, or—or the ither thing?" The little man sniggered once more.

"Oh, whiles the yin an' whiles the ither," said Mr. Redhorn, crushing the novelette deep in his pocket.

"But—but are ye no' fondest o' the truth?" the other stammered.

The host looked across at his visitor, who sat with averted gaze. Mr. Redhorn felt rather uncomfortable. He shrank from any discussion of matters religious.

"Are ye no'?" Mr. Pettigrew spoke in husky appeal.

"Weel, I daursay I prefer the truth when I can get it," the painter answered a little coldly.

The visitor dropped his hands, and clenched them between his knees. He bent forward, his eyes on the fire, and hoarsely whispered—

"Did ye notice I had a barra wi' me the nicht?"

"I did."

"What dae ye think is in that barra?"

Mr. Redhorn scratched his nose reflectively.

"Sclates," he said at last.

"Truth!" said Mr. Pettigrew solemnly, and then sniggered weakly.

"What!"

"Truth!" repeated the slater, recovering his seriousness. "That barra's loadit wi' truth, an' naething but truth."

Instinctively Mr. Redhorn pushed back his chair an inch or two, and gripped the arms, ready to rise ere the other could spring. He remembered a tale he had once read, entitled—"Alone with a Madman." He decided swiftly that he must humour his visitor.

"So yer barra's loadit wi' truth," he said, not quite steadily. "That—that's exceedin'ly gratifyin', Alexander." The smile was decidedly overdone.

"Dinna mak' a mock o' me," said Mr. Pettigrew, piteously and humbly. "It was left to ma wife by her uncle on her mither's side, an' her an' me's sweirt to pairt wi' it. But we've naething else, an'—"

"What are ye speakin' aboot?" the painter asked. "I dinna understaun'. I trust ye're sober, Alexander Pettigrew," he said sternly.

"Oh, I'm sober. I wish I wasna. But d'ye ken what I've got in the barra, ootbye?"

"Criftens, man! What ails ye?"

Mr. Pettigrew may not have heard the question. "Did ye ever see a—a—en-cy-clo-podia?" he asked.

"A what?"

"En-cy-clo-podia. A—a book aboot truth,

an' naething but truth. There a dizzen volumes, an' they're ootbye in ma barra. I—I'll tak' three pound for the lot."

Mr. Redhorn rose to his feet.

"It's time ye was in yer bed, man," he said, not unkindly.

"Aw, but wait a meenute." Mr. Pettigrew rose also. "Wait till ye see the en-cy-clo-podia. It's fu' o' readin', an' every word's truth. It's fifty year auld an' I hear auld books is gettin' extraornar' valuable nooadays. Wait a meenute, Joseph."

He waddled to the door, opened it, and disappeared, leaving his host standing in the middle of the room. Out in the dark he fumbled in the barrow, under a piece of sacking. Presently he re-entered the house, bearing a couple of heavy tomes, cloth-bound, in dark blue, and in a fair state of preservation.

"There a dizzen like that," he said, holding out a volume to Mr. Redhorn. "Three-pound-ten isna muckle to pey for a lifetime's readin'. An' the wife says they wud gi'e a tone to ony hoose."

Mr. Redhorn waved the volume away. He realized the position now. "I'm no' wantin' to buy yer books, man," he said shortly.

"But it—it's a en-cy-clo-podia! There's naebody on the shore has a en-cy-clo-podia."

"Weel, weel, maybe that's true. But I'm no' wantin' it. What for did ye bring it to me?"

"It was the wife said to bring it to you. She seen ye g'ein' gundy to some o' the weans, an' she thocht ye was a kind man. An' she was shair ye wudna tell onybody, an' she kent ye was a reader, an' she thocht ye wud tak' care o' the en-cy-clo-podia, an'—an' we're awfu' hard up the noo. Ye see, I've been unco unlucky this while back."

Mr. Redhorn's countenance, which had begun to soften, hardened again.

"Unlucky? Hoo unlucky?" he quickly inquired.

The little man drew back, and one of the volumes crashed on the floor.

"I was hearin' reports," said the painter slowly, "that ye was pittin' money on horses. Was that it?"

"Never again," mumbled the other.

"So it's true. Weel, I didna believe it. I didna believe a man wi' a wife an' seeven weans wud ha'e time to think aboot race-horses. Did ye ever see a race-horse? Did ye?"

Mr. Pettigrew shook his head.

"Neither did I. But I wud as sune pit masel' on yin as pit ma money on it. That's a' I've got to say. It's gettin' late."

The little man stooped and picked up the volume he had dropped. "Wud ye no'—?" he began.

"Na, na," said Mr. Redhorn firmly.

"Twa-pound-ten," whispered the other.

"I'm no' wantin' yer books—or yer wife's

books, Alexander Pettigrew. I've nae use for them. Tak' them to a bookseller in the toon."

"But the money's needit for the morn's mornin'."

"Horses?"

"Na, na. The wife needs it to pey an account. It's a lawyer—"

"I'm vexed to hear it, but I canna buy yer books."

The little man said no more. He looked very tired as he turned to the door, laden with the two volumes.

Mr. Redhorn opened the door for him, and watched him place the volumes in the barrow, under the sacking. The painter had a virtuous horror of the turf, and his heart was hardened. Besides, his acquaintance with Pettigrew was comparatively slight.

The little man grasped the handles of his barrow.

"I'll jist ha'e to tell the wife ye wasna heedin' aboot her en-cy-clo-podia," he said drearily. "Guid-nicht."

"Guid-nicht," returned Mr. Redhorn.

He watched the squat figure trundling its burden into the gloom. It grew faint. Quite suddenly it appealed pathetically to Mr. Redhorn, or perhaps he had a vision of its destination.

He ran after it. . . .

"Come back, an' I'll lend ye the three pound."

VII

BUFFOONERY

MR. REDHORN entered the pretty parlour of the Misses Lavendar's villa.

"I'll tell them ye're here, Maister Ridhorn," said the middle-aged general servant who had shown him in.

"Thenk ye," returned Mr. Redhorn, fumbling with his cap.

"Tak' a sate, Mr. Ridhorn," continued the maid genially. "We're gettin' the cauld weather noo."

"Deed, ay." The painter sat down on the edge of the chair behind the door, dropped his cap, picked it up, and stared at the carpet.

"Weel, I better tell them ye're here," said the maid, lingering. "Are ye busy the noo, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Middlin'," he replied, transferring his gaze to the clock on the mantelpiece.

"We're gettin' near the end o' anither year," she remarked.

"Ay." Mr. Redhorn's brevity was defensive rather than offensive. For three years at least he had been desperately afraid of Flora's

friendliness. He was a lonely man, and for lonely men of his age, which was about fifty, there is sometimes a Queen as well as a King of Terrors.

“Weel,” said Flora again, “I best tell them ye’re here.” She nodded good-naturedly to him and left the room.

Mr. Redhorn, breathing audibly, passed his hand over his scanty hair, and, producing his handkerchief, wiped his brows.

“I didna commit masel’ that time, the Lord be thankit,” he muttered, and fell to wondering what the Misses Lavendar, whose house he had painted and papered, and, as he put in the bill, decorated, only a few months previously, could be wanting with him on this particular evening.

Without having kept him long in suspense the ladies appeared. The Misses Lavendar, Mary and Lucy, would have been the last to deny that they were elderly; yet, if they had not actually grown in beauty side by side, they had flourished together in that personal charm and that personal daintiness which can make sixty as sweet in many ways as sixteen. Their home had been in Fairport for many years, but they let the villa for the summer months and saw a bit of the world, as they expressed it, with the proceeds; for they had to take care of the pounds, even if the shillings and pence were sometimes allowed to take care of themselves.

"Good-evening, Mr. Redhorn," they said together, smiling kindly upon the painter, who had risen on their entrance and now stood in a respectful but bashful attitude.

"Please sit down," said Miss Mary; "over here, please—not in the door's draught." As Mr. Redhorn removed himself to the edge of a chair near the fire, she continued: "We hope you did not mind being disturbed this evening, but my sister and I were particularly anxious to have a few words with you."

"I—I hope," stammered Mr. Redhorn anxiously, "I hope ye've had nae cause for complaint wi' ma pentin', paper-hangin', an'—"

"Oh, dear, no!" cried Miss Mary. "Everything has been very satisfactory—very satisfactory, indeed—"

"I'm rale prood to hear ye say it, mem," said the painter, blushing. "But excuse me for interruptin' ye, mem."

"The matter we wished to see you about is quite another matter," went on Miss Mary.

"It isn't a business matter, Mr. Redhorn," Miss Lucy put in with a smile.

"No, it isn't a business matter," said Miss Mary. She halted and turned to her sister. "Perhaps, Lucy, you would explain to Mr. Redhorn. You know it was your idea to begin with."

Lucy, the younger by two years, laughed. "I knew you were nervous, Mary. Well, Mr.

Redhorn," turning to the painter, "my sister and I are going to ask a great favour—a very great favour—of you."

After a slight hesitation, Mr. Redhorn, breathing hard, said solemnly: "If it's ony-thing I can dae, mem, I'll dae it. But—but I hope ye're no' wantin' me to droon yer cat. I ken it's gettin' auld, but—aweel, I yinst near drooned a cat to oblige a leddy, an' it haunts me yet."

"Oh," cried Miss Mary, "it is nothing so dreadful as that! We hope to have poor pussy with us for a long time, yet."

"I'm glad to hear it, mem. But the last time I was invitit to ca' on gentry in the evenin', it was for that same objec'. I ask yer paardon for interruptin' ye, mem."

"I'll explain as quickly as possible," said Miss Lucy. "Perhaps you know that at the New Year my sister and I endeavour to provide some little treat for the Fairport children."

"Fine I ken it, mem!"

"Well, this year we find we must be absent from Fairport for the New Year week—"

"The weans'll be sair disapp'intit."

"But we propose to try to give them a little treat at Christmas. I know they don't hold Christmas here as a rule—"

"Jist the gentry hauds it, mem. Excuse me interruptin' ye, mem."

"But my sister and I are going to risk the

innovation. Do you think any of the children here have ever had a Christmas-tree, Mr. Redhorn?"

The painter shook his head. "Never! But Christmas cairds is becomin' mair fashionable every year, though I never got a caird but the yinst, an' it was a mistak' on the pairt o' the postman. But excuse me for—"

"Well," Miss Lucy resumed, "we are going to have a Christmas-tree, and what we require now is a Father Christmas. You understand?"

"Ay, I've seen picturs o' Fayther Christmas, mem."

"Then, Mr. Redhorn, do you think you could so greatly oblige us as to make yourself like one of the pictures of Father Christmas?" Miss Lucy leant forward and smiled beseechingly at the painter.

Mr. Redhorn regarded her with stunned amazement.

"You see," Miss Lucy continued, "our tree would not be complete without a Father Christmas to give away the gifts to the children. And we are sure there is no one in Fairport who could do it so nicely as you, Mr. Redhorn."

"Me!" gasped the painter in consternation. He half rose from his chair.

"Please don't be alarmed," said Miss Lucy gravely, "Just think it over for a minute. We should be so greatly obliged if you would

consent. You see, with a big beard and long white hair and the costume, no one would recognize you; and, of course, my sister and I would keep it a fast secret."

"Certainly," said Miss Lucy. "We want the little ones to think of a real Father Christmas. All you would have to do, Mr. Redhorn, would be to say a few words to the children, and read aloud the little couplet attached to each gift before giving it to the child. And, of course, you would have to look as jolly as possible. Now, what do you think, Mr. Redhorn?"

The painter produced his handkerchief and applied it to a visage which was naturally anything but jolly. Yet, in all the village, Miss Lucy had declared, there was no other face which would "make up" half so effectively.

"What do you think, Mr. Redhorn?"

"Weel, mem," he replied at last, "I'm kin' o' dazed wi' yer proposeetion. It wud be a great honour to serve you twa leddies, but it's beyond me. I never yet spoke in public, an'—"

"Oh, but in your disguise you wouldn't feel nervous," said Miss Mary.

"An' what wud the folk of Fairport say when they heard about it? They wud say I was a buffoon—jist a buffoon."

"But they would never hear. My sister and I are as anxious as you to keep it a secret," said Miss Lucy.

"But—excuse me, mem—what aboot yer—yer servant?"

The ladies could not refrain from smiling.

"I think we can trust Flora," said the elder, becoming serious. "Between ourselves, Mr. Redhorn, Flora has a little secret of her own which she would not like us to divulge—in the meantime at any rate."

"A secret!" cried the painter, looking very uncomfortable.

"Yes," said Miss Lucy, "but, of course, we couldn't tell it to you, Mr. Redhorn. But I'll tell Flora that we'll keep her secret on condition that she keeps ours. So you see that you will be quite safe. And we can't tell you how indebted to you we shall be."

Mr. Redhorn wavered. Like certain men who have granted many favours unasked, he found the request for one a curiously flattering thing. Moreover his admiration for the Misses Lavendar was as deep as it was respectful. They had done him more than one kindness. To him it appeared hardly seemly that they should beg a favour of him: how much more unseemly would it be of him to refuse?

And after some more arguments from Miss Lucy he suddenly gave in.

"Weel, mem," he said in great agitation, "I'll dae it. I doot it'll be waur nor droonin' a cat, but I'll dae it. An' I hope it'll never become public, or the character of Joseph Ridhorn'll be ruined for ever."

Profuse thanks were poured upon him, reassuring statements were made and repeated, and a final comfort in the shape of a glass of wine was pressed upon him.

"Now, Mr. Redhorn," said Miss Lucy, as he was departing, "when you come for your rehearsals, bring a pot or so of paint, so that people will think you are engaged in doing a little touching up. And do not have any doubts about Flora," she added, with a laugh. "Good-night, Mr. Redhorn."

Joseph went home with his mind in a "bizz," as he termed it, and had a dreadful nightmare, in which he saw himself, in the guise of Father Christmas, being warmly embraced and kissed under the mistletoe by a domestic servant with the face of Flora. The original of this dream-picture, he remembered in the morning, had been nothing worse than a grocer's calendar. But what, he wondered anxiously, was Flora's secret, and why, oh! why, had Miss Lavendar bidden him to have no doubts about Flora?

Mr. Redhorn attended the necessary rehearsals with punctuality if not pleasure. It seemed to him that Flora smiled more kindly upon him each time she opened the door, though she made no reference to his errand.

Miss Lucy found him a fairly intelligent pupil, for the painter was neither addle-pated nor illiterate. He was soon word-perfect in the introductory lines which Miss Lucy had com-

posed for the occasion, and after considerable practice he was able to move about in his gaudy robes with moderate embarrassment and awkwardness. The chief difficulty to be overcome lay in his voice, nature having provided him with a peculiarly high one, the sound of which on the great evening, he felt, would almost certainly betray him.

“Yes; that is much better,” Miss Lucy would say when he had declaimed the lines correctly, albeit in extremely affected accents, “but try to be a little less gruff, please. I’m afraid that would frighten the very little ones. Do not speak as if you were about to devour them, Mr. Redhorn.”

Whereupon Mr. Redhorn, perspiring with self-consciousness, would try again in a higher key, and get on so well that he would forget and let his voice run away up to its natural compass.

“Never mind,” Miss Lucy would say in her kindest manner, “I’m quite sure you’ll manage perfectly on Christmas.”

“I doot I’ll be naethin’ but a spectacle o’ gorgeous inbeceelity,” the painter would mournfully reply, only to be further petted and cheered and encouraged by his indefatigable tutor.

Often Mr. Redhorn was sorely tempted to throw up the whole affair, and once he almost decided to depart secretly from Fairport, even if such action meant his leaving the country

for foreign parts. But if he was a coward, he was also loyal.

Said Miss Lucy to her sister on several occasions: "Really, Mary, Joseph Redhorn is the finest gentleman I've met, so far as obliging ladies is concerned. The performance is agony to him, I can see, and I'm sometimes sorry I persuaded him to do it. But it is too late to make any change. The sensitive creature would break his heart if I stopped him now; nothing would convince him that *he* was not at fault."

And all too soon Christmas arrived.

The children came in a body at half-past four. First they were regaled with the grandest tea they had ever had. Then they had games; then a magic-lantern show, followed by light refreshments. The Christmas-tree was to be the final and crowning joy.

Immediately after the commencement of the magic-lantern show, Mr. Redhorn, who was waiting, in a condition of semi-collapse, at the back door, was admitted by Flora. Her beaming, affectionate glances wellnigh completed his demoralization; and when she whispered that after the performance he was to partake of a rare supper in the kitchen—such having been the Misses Lavendar's instructions—he felt like flight. Just then, however, Miss Lucy appeared, all smiles and confidence, and led him to the room wherein he was to disguise

himself. Miss Lucy, who in her younger days had taken part in theatricals, promised to return in good time to apply the finishing touches.

As he donned the festive raiment, Joseph Redhorn cursed himself bitterly.

“Ye muckle buffoon!” he muttered to his image in the mirror. “Ye gorgeous gowk! Ye deleerious, misguided cuddy! This is a bonny mess ye’ve gotten yersel’ in! An’ it’s no’ the buffoonery that’s the warst. The warst’ll tak’ place i’ the kitchen later on. If I didna ken the Miss Lavendars was leddies, I wud say the hale thing was a doonricht trap—ay, a conspeeracy ’twixt them an’ Flora. I’ll be that excitet efter ma performance that I’ll no’ ken what I’m daein’ or sayin’, an’ Flora’ll snap me up afore I ken whaur I am. Guid peety me! I’m a lost man this nicht!”

And at that moment an idea occurred to him. It was only a straw on his expanse of trouble, but he clutched at it.

“Supposin’ I was to mak’ masel’ sic a dementit buffoon the nicht that she wudna like me ony mair?”

When the children were gathered and seated in the drawing-room, which, by the way, had been stripped of all light ornaments and knick-knacks, the curtains of the big bay window were drawn aside, and lo! there was the glittering Christmas-tree, and behold! there was

Father Christmas, resplendent in a scarlet robe, trimmed with down and spangles to represent snow and frost.

It has been suggested already that Joseph Redhorn was a nervous man, but terror can sometimes do for nervous men what tonics cannot. He had just looked in the glass without knowing himself, and he felt safe even from the children's sharp sight. There was a wild look in his pale blue eyes, but he bowed to the children so oddly that all laughed, saving the very little ones who were not yet quite convinced that he was not a bogey.

With due gravity he recited Miss Mary's "Ode of welcome," which included an explanation of his own presence from the Far North. Now and then his voice jumped an octave or so, but as he looked upwards as if to see whither it was going, the accident was productive of nothing worse than merriment. Even a violent sneeze was received with such delight, that he repeated it again and again, until the Misses Lavendar feared for his wig. Then, as though exhausted, he made to sit down on a convenient chair, and sat on the floor instead. This was not quite the Misses Lavendar's idea of Father Christmas, but the young folks were so obviously pleased, that the ladies could not feel angry.

"Dae anither back-fa'!" cried one of the excited little boys, who was promptly suppressed by his sister.

It was now time to distribute the gifts, each of which had a child's name and couplet attached. The first was for Mabel Brown, and Father Christmas very nearly called out "Broon."

The smallest girl present came shyly forward, and Father Christmas read aloud the couplet—

*"This doll comes hoping little Mabel
Will be as good as she is able."*

"And," added the inspired Mr. Redhorn, "I hope the doll will be as good as *it* is able. We'll jist sort it to make sure." Saying which he chastised the doll before handing it to the child. It is possible that the little boys enjoyed this better than did the little girls.

"Next!" cried Father Christmas. "Jeannie Ross."

Jeannie approached.

*"This book, with love, to Jeannie Ross.
'Tis better to be kind than cross."*

Inspiration failed this time, so Jeannie went back to her seat in a silence so trying to Mr. Redhorn that he pretended to have got his beard entangled in the tree which, wisely enough, had not been lit with candles. Childish rapture rewarded this device; and then was called the name of "Betty MacDonald."

*"This box of paints is given to Betty
Because she likes to make things pretty."*

" 'Deed, an' I'll gi'e ye a job, Betty," said Mr. Redhorn, forgetting his character and remembering his trade at the sight of the paints.

Happily, though every one laughed, no one seemed to suspect Father Christmas of being more than a joker, and the distribution proceeded. For a while Mr. Redhorn, sobered by his mistake, was most discreet, but his temporary madness regained its control, and when the boys' turns came he surpassed his previous efforts and drew forth shrieks of merriment by his antics and remarks, the latter indicating that his knowledge of the Fairport boys' little failings was wonderfully extensive for one who had been said to spend practically the whole year in the Far North.

When the last gift had been given, the curtains were drawn together, and Father Christmas sat down to wait until the little guests had taken their departure. The natural reaction set in, and Joseph Redhorn was his melancholy self again. He tore off his beard and flung it on the floor; his wig followed. He groaned.

Clothed, if not quite in his right mind, Mr. Redhorn, having received many thanks and a beautiful book of poems from the sisters, was being gently urged by them towards the kitchen. Through the open door thereof his eyes beheld a table laid with good things, in-

cluding a small bottle of wine at one of the two places.

"Thenk ye, thenk ye," he stammered. "But I couldna eat a bite. I better get awa' hame."

"Nonsense!" said the sisters gaily.

"Here's Mr. Redhorn, Flora," cried Miss Lucy.

The trembling Joseph had perforce to enter. The door closed behind him.

"Weel, Maister Ridhorn," said Flora kindly. "Hoo are ye feelin' noo?"

"Low, awfu' low," replied the painter in a husky squeak.

"Nae wonder," said Flora sympathetically. "Sit ye doon. The wee bottle's for yersel', wi' Miss Mary's compliments o' the season."

"Thenk ye, thenk ye; but I couldna—"

"Toots, havers! Listen! I'm gaun to tell ye something, Joseph Ridhorn. I was vexed at first to think o' a man like you makin' sic a mountebank o' hissel', but then I was prood to ken the man that wud dae it to please ma led-dies."

Mr. Redhorn wriggled. If this was not court-ing, what was it?

"A while back they speirt at me if I thocht ye wud dae it, an' I said I didna think there was a man hereaboots wud play the mountebank for onybody. But *you've* did it, an' I'm prood to ken ye, for there's no' mony leddies like Miss Mary an' Miss Lucy, an' I'm kin' o' vexed I've got to leave them sune."

“Leave them?” gasped the painter.

“Ay. I’ll tell ye a secret, Joseph Ridhorn, for it’ll no’ be a secret lang. I’m gettin’ mair-rit at the New Year. He’s a weedower, but he’s nane the waur o’ that. He’ll ken no’ to expec’ ower muckle. But he’s a dacent man——”

“A weedower!” yelled Joseph, starting up. Oh! rapture! Oh! blessed relief!

“Whisht, man! John Sorley’s his name, an’ he bides at Kilmabeg. Ye’ll maybe ken him. Ye’ll come to the waddin’, I hope.

“May the Lord bless ye, Flora,” cried Mr. Redhorn. “But what wey—oh! what wey did ye no’ tell me that afore?”

“It was a secret,” said Flora, laughing, “a secret like Fayther Christmas. Weel, we best be takin’ wur suppers.”

“I only hope,” said Joseph slowly, “that ma secret’ll be as weel kept as yer ain.”

VIII

“SALMON-PINK”

MR. REDHORN regarded with a pained expression the latest handiwork of his youthful apprentice.

“Wullie,” he said at last, “when in future I’m compelled to gang frae hame, I’ll gi’e ye a holiday. When I set oot for Glesca this mornin’, leavin’ the pentin’ o’ this meat-safe to yer ain judgment, I was under the impression that ye had some discretion, no’ to mention taste. I noo perceive that ye’ve naethin’ but oreeginality. An’ oreeginality wi’oot discretion’ll maybe mak’ ye an’ artist, but never a penter.”

“What’s wrang wi’ the meat-safe?” the boy inquired, a trifle sulkily. He had been expecting praise, having been more than usually careful over his work.

“For a what-not, or whatever they ca’ it, in the boudoir o’ a doochess, the colourin’ is dootless perfec’, but a sawmon-pink meat-safe, ladie, is an atrocity o’ the deepest dye! I’m thenkfu’ it’s no’ veesible frae the public road, or the reputation o’ Joseph Ridhorn wud be totally extinguished. Oh, Wullie! What made ye dae it?”

The apprentice hung his head. "I thocht it wud look pretty," he muttered.

"Pretty! But a meat-safe is no' intended to be pretty; it should be modest an' retirin'. Weel," continued the painter, with a sigh, "I suppose there's naethin' for it but to write aff the sawmon-pink as a bad debt, an' pit on a subdued colour afore the new owner, Mrs. Manson, comes on Monday efternune. We've jist time to dae it. First thing the morn's mornin', Wullie, ye'll gi'e it a coat o' dark green; it'll be ready on Monday mornin' for the second coat. An' mind that oreeginality wi'oot dis-cretion is—"

"But the morn's Seturday, Mr. Ridhorn. Ye said I was to get a holiday for the sports at Ardmartin."

"Ay, ay. But yer holiday'll ha'e to be cancelled or postponed. Business afore pleesure, ye ken, laddie! I canna attend to the meat-safe for ye, for the green-hoose has to be feen-ished afore Mrs. Manson's here—d'ye see? An' ye'll need to help me wi' the green-hoose like-wise."

For a master addressing his apprentice Mr. Redhorn's tone might have been considered a trifle apologetic.

"What's she comin' here for on Monday?" said Willie rebelliously.

"It's no' yours to reason why, as the poet says," Mr. Redhorn replied. "Mrs. Manson'll be here on Monday efternune, D. V., an' that's

a' that concerns you an' me, laddie. When ye're aulder, ye'll learn that the great majority o' great events happens at the wrang times. In the meantime pey attention to the job ye're engaged for."

"But ye said I wud get to the sports, Mr. Ridhorn," said the boy reproachfully, yet not disrespectfully.

Mr. Redhorn rubbed his nose, as was his way when at a loss.

"True, Wullie," he murmured reflectively. "True."

He then pushed back his hat, and stroked his head, his custom when desperate.

"True," he repeated; "meseerably true! . . . But I promise ye never to promise ye a holiday again—so ye'll never be disapp'intit in future. I'm vexed for ye noo, but I canna help it. . . . Efter a'," he continued, "sport isna everything, though the newspapers mak' it seem next to that. I read in the papers the ither day that this country wud never ha'e been what it is, if it hadn'a been for golf. That's the sort o' remark I wud expec' frae a—a hen. It's work—hard work—the work that mak's a man useless efter he's had his tea—that has made this country what it is! An' sport'll be the death o' it! . . . But ye're ower young to appreciate ma pessimistic views, Wullie. Ye best come hame wi' me noo, an' get yer tea. I've a pot of rhubarb-ginger that wud gratify an angel, forbye bein' soothin' to the digeestion. Come

awa'! Ye canna dae onything mair to the meat-safe the day. We canna undae wur blunders, but, thenks to Providence, in some cases we can let them dry an' gi'e them a fresh coat. Come awa', laddie!"

Willie hesitated. The rhubarb-ginger was tempting, but not sufficiently so to overcome his resentment.

"I promised ma mither I wud be hame at sax o'clock," he said. (As if his mother would not understand his non-appearance to indicate that he was once more enjoying an evening meal at his employer's table!)

Mr. Redhorn glanced at his apprentice, but the young face was averted.

"Weel, weel," said the man quietly, "it canna be helpit. Ye best rin hame, for it's near sax noo. I'll look efter yer pot an' brushes. Guid-nicht to ye."

Had he been given the chance, Willie might have changed his mind; as it was, there was nothing left for him but to depart, with a mumbled "guid-nicht" in response to his master's.

On reaching home Mr. Redhorn flung himself into the shabby easy-chair at the fireside, and lit a cigarette of the worst possible quality. He wanted a cup of tea badly, but had not the energy to prepare it, apart from the fact that the woman who did odd jobs for him had all but smothered the fire with dross.

He was in a dismal humour. His day's business in Glasgow had been satisfactory enough, but Glasgow's pavements and Glasgow's racket always made his feet sore and his head ache. Besides, during the steamer journey he had heard of the bankruptcy of a gentleman who had recently caused his summer residence at Fairport to be repainted, repapered, and generally redecorated regardless of expense—"ma expense," reflected Mr. Redhorn bitterly.

Nevertheless the bad debt was as nothing to his apprentice's refusal of the invitation to tea. That had stabbed Joseph Redhorn, and at the end of an hour the wound rankled. Never before had the boy refused such an invitation, and it was only now that the bachelor realized how much it had meant to have the youngster sharing his evening meal in the past.

"A' the same," he told himself, "it wud never dae to let the laddie rin aff to sports when there's work to be done. We canna afford to offend a new-comer to Fairport. I'll jist ha'e to try an' mak' it up to him some ither wey. As for the sawmon-pink, that was a mere indiscretion. I daursay I did as bad when I was an apprentice. I hope I didna hurt the laddie's feelin's. I hope he isna broodin' ower ma words."

At that moment Willie, having bolted his tea, was engaged in a football match with other youths of the village.

"Ay," reflected Mr. Redhorn, "ma tongue is ower quick wi' satirical observations. I maun curb it."

He lit another cigarette and stirred the fire. The dross provided an effective extinguisher, and eventually he boiled his kettle on wood. Fortunately it was a warm summer evening, and the fire was not otherwise necessary.

He made an indifferent meal—without opening the pot of "rhubarb-ginger." Afterwards he thought of going out, but soon decided to pass the hours till bedtime with one of the penny novelettes, of which he always kept a stock. As a matter of fact, he was afraid he might meet his apprentice and the latter's reproachful gaze.

"I shouldna ha'e laid sic a heavy responsibility on the laddie," he told himself. "Nae doot, at his age, I wud ha'e chose pea-green for a kirk door."

Reflections such as these considerably interrupted his enjoyment of a tale which, in ordinary circumstances, he would have found entralling. To-night, however, he was somewhat disposed to despise the hero and ignore the heroine's many miseries, while the villain's cold-blooded schemes of murder left him unmoved. In fact, he once read half-way through a paragraph on the dietetic advantage of currants ere he realized that it was not part of the story. And when the heroine exclaimed, "Yours for ever, Reginald!" he closed the book-

let, saying, "I wisht I could ha'e let the laddie gang to the sports."

It was not until he was in bed, a little after eleven, that the happy thought struck him.

"If," he considered, "if the sun can rise aboot three a. m., why no' Joseph Ridhorn?" To which he added: "I wisht I had an alarm clock."

Being without that useful article, he re-lit his lamp, and read several novelettes. He also smoked too many cigarettes. But he was up at 3:30.

When Willie reached the scene of his indiscreet labours at seven o'clock—he was half an hour late—he found the meat-safe no longer salmon-pink and Mr. Redhorn diligently applying white paint to the green-house.

Mr. Redhorn was inclined to be apologetic.

"I had insomnia, Wullie," he remarked, with a smile, the weariness of which struck the boy.

"Is't yer inside again?" said Willie. "Wud ye no' gang hame to yer bed, an' let me pent the green-hoose?"

Mr. Redhorn was touched.

"I'm better workin', Wullie. Insomnia, I should explain, has naethin' to dae wi' the organism o' the interior. It's purely moral. I hope ye'll never ken what it is. If ye like, ye can bring me a tin o' water frae the pump thonder—which reminds me that the pump's got to be pentit—for, to tell the truth, I smokit ower mony ceegaurettes last nicht. Never smoke

ceegaurettes, Wullie, unless ye can dae it in moderation. An' there's no' mony things a man can dae in moderation, excep' work. . . . Hoo dae ye like the meat-safe noo?"

"It's gey ugly. But I suppose it'll be better efter the second coat," said Willie grudgingly.

"It'll be as handsome a meat-safe as ever ye seen," replied Mr. Redhorn, his professional enthusiasm triumphing over all else. "An' noo I'm gaun to gi'e ye a holiday; an' I hope ye'll enjey the sports. There a shillin' to buy yer denner. Eat plenty, but refrain frae leemonade an' ither gassifyin' beverages." The latter part of Mr. Redhorn's remarks was made to cover his confusion, for Willie's visage betrayed considerable emotion.

"Ha'e!" said the painter, holding out the coin.

The boy shook his head.

"I canna," he said in a low voice.

Mr. Redhorn was hurt. Was he never to be forgiven his observations of the previous evening?

"Wullie," he said slowly, "I want ye to help me till breakfast-time; but efter that I want ye to gang to Ardmartin an' see the sports."

Again Willie shook his head. "I'll help ye," he muttered, and seized a pot and brush, "but I'm no' gaun to Ardmartin."

"What wey that?"

Getting no answer, the painter sighed and

resumed his work. Willie was not usually so changeable.

There was a long silence. Then—

"Mr. Ridhorn—please."

"What, Wullie?"

"I—I meant to gang to Ardmartin the day. I—I meant to rin awa' efter breakfast."

Mr. Redhorn paused in his painting and rubbed his nose with his disengaged hand.

"Aw, did ye?" he said very sadly. "I didna think ye wud dae that to me, laddie."

"I'll d-d-dae onything ye like noo," whispered the boy, "if—if ye'll let me stop an' help ye."

Mr. Redhorn made no response.

"Please," said Willie.

"Weel," returned the painter at last, "I suppose I maun gi'e ye credit for yer confession. Proceed wi' yer pentin', an' I'll think what's to be done."

"Dinna gi'e me the kick," the boy pleaded.

"I'll see," said Mr. Redhorn, well aware that he could never bring himself to dismiss his apprentice. . . . "Tits! laddie! ye're pittin' on the pent as if it was plaster!"

"I canna help it," replied Willie, with a sniff and a gulp.

"Weel, weel," said Mr. Redhorn, who was near to gulping himself, "I forgi'e ye, laddie, I forgi'e ye. An' we'll say nae mair aboot it."

And neither they did, excepting to arrange to work very hard until noon, and then go to the Ardmartin sports together.

Which seems such a tame conclusion to the whole matter that perhaps an appendix is necessary.

Mrs. Manson, the new owner of the green-house, meat-safe, and other items, duly arrived on Monday afternoon, and in the evening, Mr. Redhorn, accompanied by Willie, called to inquire whether his work had been satisfactory and, incidentally, to endeavour to obtain further business.

“Yes,” said the lady, “I am pleased with everything but the meat-safe. I do wish you had not made it so dark. I may say I am partial to bright things—in fact I like to have everything around me as cheerful as possible. Had I thought, I would have told you to paint the meat-safe a light green, or a pretty pale blue, or even pink—anything bright is better than dark, you know. My last meat-safe was pink, and looked charming.”

Master and apprentice walked a good part of the way home in silence.

“Wullie,” said Mr. Redhorn, at last, with great diffidence, “I’ve a question to ask ye. What did ye feel like daein’ when she said she preferred a pink meat-safe.”

Willie answered promptly. “I felt like handin’ her a bat on the nose.”

It was one of the happiest moments of Joseph Redhorn’s life.

IX

“ NAE SONGSTER ”

WITHIN the shed which he called his shop Mr. Redhorn was engaged in mixing certain paints, inwardly lamenting the dirty weather that had interrupted a job of considerable importance. It was an afternoon in November, and Fairport was looking its worst.

“ I wish I was an armadillo or ony ither o’ the ampheeblous beasts that lies torpid i’ the winter,” he said to himself. “ I suppose I sud be rale thenkfu’ I’m no’ a martyr to dyspepsia nooadays; but it’s deeficul’t to be thenkfu’ for onything when ye’ve got chilblains. Oh, criftens!—I beg yer paardon, mem. Was ye wantin’ me? ”

The door had opened, and a middle-aged lady in a brown cloak, holding a streaming umbrella, stood on the threshold. The painter soon recognized her as Miss Ling, who had recently come to reside in Fairport.

“ Are you Mr. Joseph Redhorn? ” the lady inquired, with a pleasant smile.

“ The same,” replied Mr. Redhorn, in his

best manner and with cordiality, for he scented business. The cottage which Miss Ling had inherited had not, to his certain knowledge, smelt of paint for a dozen years. "Step inside, mem, oot the wat," he added.

"Can I have a word with you, Mr. Redhorn?" said the lady, accepting the invitation.

"A thoosan', mem," returned the painter, seizing a cloth and rubbing the only chair in the place. It was a very good chair, only it wanted a back. "Excuse the lack o' accommodation in ma premises, if ye please," he continued. "Wull ye please accep' o' a sate, mem?"

The lady graciously thanked him, and seated herself. While Mr. Redhorn closed the door she set her umbrella—a miserable-looking umbrella it was—against the wall, not noticing that she placed the point in a pot containing some five inches of cream-coloured paint.

Mr. Redhorn came back from the door and stood at attention.

"Shockin' weather, mem," he remarked.

"Dreadful!" Miss Ling replied. Then, with a little bow, she said: "I understand, Mr. Redhorn, that you are very musical."

The painter's best smile became a gape. "Mem?" he said at last, as if he had not heard properly.

"I understand that you are very musical," she repeated kindly, "and that you are the possessor of an excellent voice."

Mr. Redhorn rubbed his forehead and regarded his visitor with stupefied amazement.

Miss Ling, realizing that she had to deal with an extremely bashful individual, endeavoured to set him at his ease by saying she hoped she had not interrupted him in any highly important business.

The painter, partially recovering himself at the word business, assured her stumblingly that he was entirely at her service.

“That is very good of you, Mr. Redhorn,” she returned. “Perhaps, to begin with, I ought to explain that several ladies”—she mentioned a few names—“and myself have thought it would be a nice thing, during the winter months especially, if Fairport had a musical society or association. And we feel sure that quite a satisfactory choir could be recruited from the village. Mrs. Lightbody has undertaken to conduct, and the Misses Lavendar would also help to train the choir. Quite a number of people have already promised to attend practisings, and if we could be certain of a few more male voices, we should feel justified in forming an association right away. There would, of course, be a very small subscription for membership—to cover cost of music, etcetera. With regular practice this winter, I believe we would be able to give several enjoyable concerts next winter, which, I think you will admit, would be a great boon to the people in Fairport, who don’t have too many

amusements for the long nights. Well, Mr. Redhorn, what do you think of the idea?"

Mr. Redhorn stroked his nose, "I'm nae judge o' music masel', mem," he said slowly, "but I daursay the Fairport folk'll enjoy the concerts fine—if ye get a guid comic."

"A what, Mr. Redhorn? I don't quite—er—"

"A comic, mem. A buffoon, ye ken. The advertisements ca' him a comedian."

"Oh, I see. But have you any comedians in Fairport?"

"Na; ye wud need to procure him frae the toon. I believe comics is gey expensive."

"Oh, but you have misunderstood the idea," cried the lady. "The association would be entirely composed of Fairport people—amateurs, not professionals. We should not think of having outsiders to perform at our concerts. That would never do!"

Mr. Redhorn shook his head. "I yinst gaed to a concert whaur there was nae comic—jist plain singin' an' fiddlin' an' a recitation aboot a railway accident. That concert, mem," he said solemnly, "was doomed. Frae the first screech to the concludin' remarks it was a failure. In ma humble oopenion, a comic is indispensable."

"Well, well," said Miss Ling, laughing good-humouredly "we'll see, when the time comes. It will be time enough to think of our concert programme a year hence. Meantime, we must

try to make the practisings as interesting and enjoyable as possible. Now, what about *your* voice, Mr. Redhorn?"

" Ma v'ice, mem?" exclaimed Joseph, recoiling.

" Come, come, Mr. Redhorn," said the lady playfully. " You must not be too modest about your accomplishments. I think I can guess that you are a tenor."

The painter's speaking voice was certainly high-pitched. It was also somewhat thin.

" A light tenor, I daresay," she continued. " Well, we want tenors, and I'm delighted to have discovered you."

" I—I doot ye've made some mistak', mem," stammered Mr. Redhorn.

" Are you a baritone? I shouldn't have thought so, but still I'm delighted to—"

" There's some mistak', mem," he interrupted feebly.

Miss Ling began to find the bashfulness rather tiresome.

" May I put down your name for the choir?" she asked abruptly.

He threw out a protesting hand. " Ye've made a mistak', mem," he said. " I—I canna sing."

" Oh, nonsense, Mr. Redhorn!" She produced a notebook and pencil.

" I declare to ye, I'm no' a songster—no' a songster o' ony description!" he said wildly.

" We'll see about that at the first practice!"

she retorted brightly, and entered his name in the notebook.

Mr. Redhorn groaned. "Dae ye no' believe me, mem? I'm no' a songster—upon ma word an' honour, I'm no' a songster!"

Miss Ling looked up. His earnestness puzzled her. "Of course, if you really don't want to help—" she began.

"It's no' that, mem. But I'm tellin' ye the truth when I say that I ha'ena lifted up ma v'ice for mair nor thirty year. That's genuine!"

"Thirty years! Why, I understood—"

"Excuse me, mem, an' I'll tell ye something that'll gar ye see I'm speakin' the truth. When I cam' to Fairport," he proceeded rapidly, "I thocht I could sing—or, to be mair exact—I didna ken I couldna sing. An' I lifted up ma v'ice i' the kirk every Sawbath—for three month, or thereabouts. An' then, yin nicht, a deputation o' three elders ca'ed upon me. They were a' exceedin' pleesant, an' I thocht at first they had come to see aboot gettin' the manse pentit. It was unco shabby at that time, an' it was a shame to pit a young meenister an' his new-mairrit wife in sic a place. But it wasna pentin' they had come aboot. They had come to request me no' to sing i' the kirk. I maun say they was rale polite an' kind. They be good wi' sayin' they trustit I wud be happy an' prosperous in Fairport, an' feenished up wi' explainin' that, somehoo, ma v'ice pit the pre-

centor aff his tune an' interfered wi' the harmony."

"What a shame!" cried Miss Ling.

"Thenk ye, mem. But they were richt enough. Of course, bein' young an' fiery, I was disposed to tak' offence. An' I daursay I did flee up, an' speirt at them if they thocht they could compel me to haud ma whisht afore the Lord. An' then the auldest elder, he begood to clap ma shoother, an' said they hadna come to threaten, but to appeal to ma generosity. 'Weel,' says I, 'I'll appeal to *your* generosity. What quid are ye gaun to gi'e me for ma quo?' I sudna ha'e spoke like that to an auld man, but, as I said, I was young an' fiery. The three askit me what I meant. An' I said I wud promise never to let oot a cheep i' the kirk again, if they promised to gi'e me the pentin' o' the manse inside o' sax month. An' I got it! My! ye never see onybody as pleased as the meenister's wife—an' hissel' forbye. But they never kent they owed their braw manse to the v'ice o' Joseph Ridhorn."

"Capital!" ejaculated Miss Ling.

"So you see, mem, I was tellin' the truth when I said I wasna a songster."

"Well, it does seem as if I had been mis-informed. I was told to-day that you were the finest singer in Fairport—in fact, that you had a remarkable voice—but that I would have to persuade you very hard to join the choir."

Joseph gasped.

"However," said the lady, rising, "I'm very glad to have made your acquaintance, and if you can't join our choir, you will perhaps be willing to do a little painting for me at the beginning of the year."

"Mem, I'll be——" Mr. Redhorn's flutter of delight collapsed. "Oh, mem! Yer um-brella!"

She had drawn it dripping from the paint pot.

"Dear, dear!" she exclaimed, looking annoyed. "And it isn't mine. My own blew inside out when I was coming along the shore. A Mrs. McWattie, who lives in a little cottage near the point, insisted on my taking hers. How very stupid of me to have put it in the paint!"

"Oh, never heed, mem, never heed. I ken Mistress McWattie—her laddie works for me—an' I'll get the umbrella cleaned an' sent back to her. There's nae need to say ony mair aboot it, mem. If ye can pit up wi' ma auld yin, it'll keep ye dry. I'll get it for ye."

Mr. Redhorn rushed out into the rain, and presently returned with his own umbrella. "When Wullie comes in, I'll send him for yer ain yin, an' he'll bring it hame to ye. We'll no' say onything, if ye please, to Mistress McWattie. . . . Ye're rale welcome, mem. Thenk ye, thenk ye." And he saw Miss Ling to the door.

A minute later he hurried after her.

"Excuse me, mem, but wud ye please inform me o' the name o' the pairty that tell't ye I was a songster?"

"I think it was the fishmonger," she replied, concealing her amusement.

"Thenk ye, mem," returned Joseph, with some emotion. "I thocht an enemy had did it," he reflected, as he went back to the shop. "But I'm no' heedin'. Criftens, I'm no' heedin'!"

And he fell to thinking of the new umbrella he would get for Mrs. McWattie, and the explanation to accompany its presentation. In order to make the explanation thoroughly satisfactory, he laid the painted umbrella on the floor, its handle resting on a brick. Then he walked to the far end of the shop. Fixing his gaze on a spot on the wall, near the roof, he retraced his steps. . . .

Crack!

"Accidents will happen," murmured Mr. Redhorn, smiling pleasantly. Then he turned and accidentally knocked over a large pot of paint.

X

“THE DELUDED FEMALE”

I

THE village was in a ferment of speculative gossip. Since the taking fire of the local police constable's chimney (which event had, appropriately enough, coincided with the local celebrations of the great Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee) nothing had occurred to stir to such an extent popular excitement. The arrest of a tinker on a charge of bigamy, the stranding of a dead whale, two parliamentary elections, the marriage of the minister, the long-continued fog of the year 1905, the week-end visit of a golf champion in the following year, the birth of a three-legged chicken—these events had in their times given rise to considerable and even heated discussions, but never during the last decade had tongues wagged as they were wagging now.

The Grey House had found a tenant at last! Perhaps one ought to say that a tenant had found the Grey House; but for years the latter, with its many blank windows and big, neglected

garden, had seemed to be looking for the former. The Grey House was a good house—so everybody in Fairport declared—but it would take much money to put it in habitable condition. And Fairport was wondering, among other things, how far Fairport would benefit materially. The baker, the butcher, and Peter Danks, the fishmonger, were inclined to be optimistic, whereas the grocer shook his head and quoted numerous instances of "swells" getting all their provisions from the city in order to save sevenpence-ha'penny or thereabouts; and whilst the joiner and plumber professed themselves hopeful, Joseph Redhorn, the painter, expressed the gloomy opinion that all Fairport would get out of the job would be the profits on board and lodging supplied to the small army of tradesmen certain to be imported from Greenock or Glasgow.

"Na, na," said Mr. Redhorn, on being rallied by some of his neighbours, "it's no' dyspepsia this time. It's a presentiment, or forebodin', which ye'll see realized in due season."

"He's been at the dictionary again," the piermaster flippantly remarked, winking at the other members of the group, and Mr. Redhorn smiled sadly, but not ill-humouredly.

"But," put in the slater, whose hopes fluctuated hourly, "but d'ye no think it's a guid sign that she's comin' to stop in Clover Cottage till the big hoose is ready for her? It looks

as if she was for superintendin' the repairs hersel' instead o' pittin' it into the charge o' some o' thae big firms in the toon. Eh?"

"To me," replied the painter, "that has nae signeeficance whatsoever. The probabeelity is that she's wantin' to get to Fairport as quick as possible for her health's sake."

"Her health's fine," said the butcher. "When she was here thon day last week, I jist said to the wife: 'Whatever she is, she's nae vegetarian.'"

"She didna appear to me to be a great eater," the plumber observed, and spat gracefully over the pier rail.

"That's the advantage o' a meat diet," returned the butcher, who weighed fifteen stone eleven pounds, warming to his pet subject of debate. "A curious thing aboot vegetarians is that they seem to keep on hankerin' for meat. They ca' some o' their messes by meat names. Ye can get vegetarian steaks an' chops. I yinst tasted a chop . . . I think it was made o' beans an' turmits an' nits an' ile——"

"Spare ma feelin's, man!" cried the painter. "Has ony o' ye had ony conversation wi the leddy?"

"I had," said the piermaster. "An' rale nice-spoken she was. We was arrangin' aboot her luggage for when she arrives on Thursday. She's comin' wi' the three-ten boat. It's a peety she's a weedow, but she'll maybe no' be lang in that condeetion."

"She's a lovely creature," observed the young baker, who wrote poems modelled on those of Burns. "A lovely creature!" he repeated, unabashed by the snigger of Mr. Danks.

"We'll ha'e to tell yer maw aboot this," said the piermaster. "Yer rolls ha'ena been up to the mark the last few mornin's, ma lad."

At this juncture the postmaster joined the group.

"Still at it!" he cried jocularly. "Still discussin' the prospects o' future work an' neglectin' the present opportunities—as Ridhorn micht say. Weel, I've got a bit news for ye. Did ye notice a young man wi' a bicycle, a wee while back? He was sendin' a telegram, an' him an' me got on the crack. He gi'ed me some information aboot Mrs. Methven."

"Did he? What did he tell ye?"

The postmaster enjoyed the curiosity which he had aroused.

"Hurry up, man! Tell us what he said. Wha is she? Whaur does she come frae?" came a shower of questions.

"She comes frae some place near Edinburgh," he said at last. "She's been a weedow five year. She writes books, but pits a different name on them."

The faces of several of the men fell.

"Writes books!" said one. "I doot that'll no' bring cash to Fairport."

"It'll maybe tak' cash oot o' Fairport," said another, "D'ye mind the man that rented

Edengrove? *He* wrote books. *You'll* mind him, Ridhorn?"

"Five pound three an' nine," the painter replied, with a reminiscent sigh.

"Aw, ye needa be feart aboot the cash in this case," the postmaster resumed. "She's a weedow wi' a fortune. She writes novelles for fun. But that's no' a' aboot her."

"What else is there?"

"She's been *in jile*," said the postmaster. He waited till the exclamations were exhausted, and added: "She's a female suffragette, if ye ken what that means."

"Oh, criftens!" murmured Mr. Redhorn, while the others expressed themselves more loudly in varied fashion. "Ma worst forebodin' is aboot to be realized!"

"Havers, Ridhorn!" said the piermaster. "Ye never foreboded onything like this. Ye never kent she had been in jile. Dinna pretend ye did. An' what difference is it gaun to mak' to Fairport?"

"Difference!" cried Mr. Redhorn in his high voice. "I tell ye," he said solemnly, "it'll shake Fairport to its vera foondations!" And without another word he turned his back on the astounded group and walked rapidly away.

II

Had Mrs. Methven been a criminal of the deepest dye, her arrival at Fairport, on that fine

spring afternoon, could scarcely have attracted more attention. The attention, however, was of a furtive sort, and might have escaped the notice of a less acute person than Mrs. Methven.

"They evidently regard us as wild beasts," she remarked to her companion, an elderly lady, as they passed down the pier; and to the piermaster, a minute later, she said sweetly: "I am sorry to see you have so many unemployed in Fairport." Whereat the piermaster grinned sheepishly and dropped a three-penny piece.

The local cab was in attendance, and when Mrs. Methven and her companion had driven off, down the loch, to Clover Cottage, at which two maids and the luggage had arrived by the morning steamer, the piermaster took care to repeat the observation just made to him. Which created considerable indignation among those who had peered from windows, spied from doorways, peeped round corners, or pretended to be discussing matters of supreme importance in the vicinity of the pier.

"We wasna lookin' at *her*," they declared almost unanimously; the chief exceptions being the butcher, who had reassured himself as to the absence of any striking indications of vegetarianism; and the young baker, who, having reasserted his opinion that she was "a lovely creature," had rushed into his shop and committed sundry lines to the blank side of a paper

bag what time twelve two-penny mutton pies in the oven below were rendered unsalable.

Amongst the few inhabitants of Fairport who did not witness the arrival was Mr. Joseph Redhorn. At three o'clock (prompt) he had resumed his work upon a garden railing, a furlong from the pier, up the loch. He was determined to behave precisely as if nothing had happened—or, to be exact, was happening. But while he refused to look at the steamer as it approached the pier, he could not help hearing the chunk of paddles; and it must be recorded that he dealt with several of the ornamental tops of the railing less methodically than was his wont.

At twenty-five minutes past three his youthful apprentice joined him, panting, and, after a glance at him, took up pot and brush.

“What like time is this to come back to yer work?” Mr. Redhorn demanded sternly. “If ye canna eat yer dinner in an ‘oor, ye best get oot o’ the pentin’ business—an’ become an artist. I’m no’ gaun to pander to yer luxurious notions—mind that!”

Willie was not unused to reproofs, but the severity of his master’s tone on this occasion fairly took him aback.

“I wasna eatin’ a’ the time,” he replied; “I—I was watchin’ the boat comin’ in.”

“Ha’e ye never seen a boat comin’ in afore?”

The boy dipped his brush and slopped it on a rail.

"See here, ma lad," Mr. Redhorn cried, "pent costs money, an' the grass is green enough."

Thus admonished the boy painted carefully for the space of five minutes.

Then—"I seen her."

"Did ye?—what are ye talkin' aboot, laddie?" The second query came fast on the heels of the first.

"The leddy that was in jile."

Mr. Redhorn frowned, but said nothing.

"Ye should ha' been at the pier," said Willie.

"I had neither the curiosity nor the ambition to see the deluded female ye refer to," Mr. Redhorn coldly returned. "Pey attention to yer pentin', or ye'll never live to taste the sweets o' success."

"What's a deluded female, Maister Redhorn?"

"I'm tellin' ye to pey attention to yer pentin'."

"I'm peyin' attention! . . . What for did she get the jile?"

"Haud yer tongue, laddie!"

For awhile the work went on in silence. At last—

"D'ye think we'll get the job at the Grey Hoose?" inquired the apprentice.

"That," said Mr. Redhorn, "is a question, but it's no' the question I wud ask—the burnin' question, to quote a famous poet——"

“What’s burnin’ aboot it?”

With his brush Mr. Redhorn waved aside the impertinence.

“The burnin’ question is,” he said ponderously, “whether I could accep’ the job at the Grey Hoose, supposin’ it was offered to me on a silver salver by a flunkey on his bended knees. That’s the burnin’ question!”

“Dy’e think she wudna pay her accoont?” Willie asked after a short pause.

“Criftens!” exclaimed the painter impatiently, “did ye never hear tell o’ principles—high moral principles?”

“Ay. I’ve heard ye gassin’—I mean speakin’—aboot them, but I didna ken what ye was drivin’ at. What wey wud ye no’ tak’ the job, if ye got the chance?”

Mr. Redhorn sighed. “I doot ye’re ower young to comprehend, Wullie,” he said; “but when ye’re as auld as me ye’ll ken what principles is—an’ likewise hoo easy it is to part wi’ them for cash. There’s lots o’ talk nooadays aboot business principles, but to mony a man,—includin’ masel’, alas!—the first business principle seems to consist in no’ permittin’ ony principles to interfere wi’ business. There ha’e been times when I’ve worked for folk that I could ha’e kicked with shupreme satisfaction—if ma moral principles had got the better o’ me. But ye see, they didna. I mind paperin’ a room in a certain man’s hoose, an’ hearin’ him ragin’ at his wife in the next

room. But I completed the job, an' was gled to get the cash later on——”

“I daur say ye was,” said Willie, who was finding the conversation rather dull. “Ye wud ha'e wantit to kick him if he hadna peyed ye.”

“Ay,” continued the painter, ignoring the interruption, “I've aye sold ma principles for cash—an' whiles made a bad debt. . . . But think what a gran' thing it wud be to refuse the Grey Hoose job—I wudna be surprised if there was a couple o' hunner pound in it—*on principle!* What a gran' thing it wud be to stan' up an' say to this deluded female: ‘Mem, it is ma duty to thenk ye for yer offer; but as yer riotous an' savage an' unseemly carry-ons are entirely agin ma principles, I respectfully decline to pit a brush to yer hoose for a' the riches o' Crusoe's!’ Wud that no' be a gran' thing, a splendid thing, Wullie?”

For several seconds the apprentice gazed wide-eyed and open-mouthed at his master.

“But she wud jist get anither penter!” he cried. “I dinna see ony sense in——”

“That's enough, that's enough!” said Mr. Redhorn, with a groan. “Pey attention to yer pentin'. Ye dinna comprehend. Ye dinna realize what harm thae deluded females are daein' to the nation forbye theirsels. Their riots may be forgotten, an' the broken windows can be repaired, but——”

“Davie, the glazier, was sayin' he hoped she wud ha'e a fling at some o' the windows

in Fairport. It wud be a fine job for him. Was it for breakin' windows she got the jile?"

The painter did not vouchsafe a reply, and another spell of work was done in silence.

"Maister Ridhorn."

"What?"

"She doesna look a bad yin."

"I didna say she was bad. I said she was deluded; an' when folk gets deluded ye can dae naethin' wi' them. Peay attention——"

"But, Maister Ridhorn."

"Criftens! What is it, laddie?"

"Am I to mind ye to tak' yer meddicine the nicht?"

Mr. Redhorn frowned, then laughed mirthlessly.

The boy looked hurt. "It wudna be the first time I had minded ye," he said in an aggrieved voice, "an' ye was aye pleased wi' me for daein' it."

"True, Wullie, true," said his master more kindly. "I had nae business to expec' ye to distinguish atween ma moral aspirations an' ma pheesical infirmity. Jist mind me to tak' ma meddicine—a dooble dose, if that'll afford ye ony amusement—an' I'll be gled to ha'e yer company at tea, includin' cake an' sardines. Meantime we'll baith pey attention to the pentin' o' thae railin's, which was oreeginally erected by a gentleman reputed to be a great thinker—chiefly aboot hissel', to judge frae the wey he treated ither folk. But we're nane o'

us perfec', laddie, an' I'm aye ready to admit it. Proceed!"

III

Mrs. Methven had resided in Fairport a full fortnight without creating any sensations otherwise than mild and pleasant. The minister had called upon her, and she had attended public worship, both events being favourably commented upon by the villagers who, after all, were quite as smart as the smartest of us in judging from outward appearances. Mrs. Methven gratified the shopkeepers. Perhaps the butcher was at first a trifle disappointed in the daily orders for Clover Cottage, for undoubtedly his expectations had been exaggerated by his too sanguine temperament. On the other hand, the grocer was jubilant. "Everything first quality, an' never a word aboot price!" he confided to all and sundry. Mr. Danks, the fish-merchant, declared that a more genuine lady had never crossed his doorstep, and that her taste in fish was far and away superior to that of many summer visitors, who considered themselves "swells." As for the young baker, he took to murmuring the words "beauteous being," and made experiments, somewhat costly, in marzipan, which he tried on his mother, not altogether to that good old dame's bodily benefit.

"I tell't ye she wud shake Fairport to its vera foondations," said Joseph Redhorn, after

reviewing the contents of the baker's window, one Saturday afternoon, "but I'm thinkin' we wud ha'e been safer wi' an or'nar' earthquake."

The joiner, plumber, and slater were disposed to agree with him, for as yet no extra business had come their way. It was variously rumoured that Mrs. Methven was too deeply immersed in the writing of a book to give a thought to Grey House, that months might elapse ere she turned her attention to its renovation, that she had purchased it merely in the hope of being able to sell it at a profit, that she was about to return to politics and, incidentally, jail. Wherefore, while one section of Fairport's population remained cheerful another was growing depressed.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Methven was resting and deliberating upon her future. Although the "cause" was as dear to her as ever, she had decided that her militant days were over. Henceforth her work lay behind the fighting line. She had recently learned that she was not so strong as she had believed herself to be, not so strong as she looked. And being a sensible woman, which is generally a woman with a sense of humour, she argued that she could quite easily get rid of her worldly goods for the furtherance of the cause without the expensive advertisement of actual martyrdom.

The end of May saw the completion of her plans. They were not without their subtlety.

“Good-afternoon!”

Mr. Redhorn turned hastily from the bench whereon he had been mixing certain colours. The dingy paint-store was suddenly flooded with sunshine, and in the narrow doorway stood the “deluded female.”

“I trust I am not disturbing you,” she said pleasantly. “I learned from your assistant, whom I met on the road, that you were to be found here. Can you spare me a few minutes, Mr. Redhorn?”

For a moment Mr. Redhorn remained speechless, petrified. As through a mist he saw a tall lady—little more than a girl she seemed to him then—with dark hair and eyes, clad in a gown of pale grey, smiling upon him in the friendliest way possible. Fifty years had not blinded him to beauty.

He remembered his manners ere he recovered his wits, and doffed his cap.

“Would you mind if I sat down, Mr. Redhorn? The sun was hot as I came along.”

With his cap the painter awkwardly dusted the only chair on the premises, and finding his voice, apologized for the chair’s lack of a back.

She thanked him with a pretty smile, seated herself gracefully, and looked him full in the eyes.

“Do you know, Mr. Redhorn,” she said quietly, “I did not expect to be so kindly re-

ceived. Indeed, I was almost afraid to call upon you."

"Afraid, mem?"

"Yes. But I'm not afraid now. You are not so—so *terrible* as I expected to find you."

"Me terrible?" said Mr. Redhorn helplessly. "Maybe ye've come to the wrang place. I'm Joseph Ridhorn, penter." From sheer force of habit he was about to add "paper-hanger and decorator," but she continued—

"Terrible, but just."

"Somebody's been tryin' to cod ye, mem," he cried involuntarily. "Was it Peter Danks, the fishmonger? That man's had his knife in me ever since—"

"Mr. Redhorn, pray understand at once that I have not been discussing you with your neighbours. 'Terrible, but just' was the impression I had formed of you, and I am only too glad to find that it was partly wrong. Still, I fancy you *could* be terrible."

Mr. Redhorn rubbed his long nose, and stole a glance of mingled gratification and suspicion at his visitor. "Terrible, but just!" Undoubtedly, he had been called worse things in his time.

"It may be," she went on, "that you and I differ as regards a certain matter much before the public at present, but I earnestly hope not. Whether we differ or not, I am about to throw myself on your mercy."

At this the painter could not help stepping

back a pace, in doing which he came into violent contact with the bench. Nevertheless, he accepted the bench's support, and wiped his forehead.

"As you are doubtless aware, Mr. Redhorn, I have recently acquired possession of a house in Airport. It is a large house, but I hope to find a use for every room in it. I don't mind telling you—though I trust you not to repeat it in the meantime—that I intend to convert Grey House into a sort of holiday home to which workers for the cause of women's suffrage may come to recruit. You understand?"

"I—I perceive yer meanin', mem," he stammered.

"I was sure you would," she said graciously. "It is very pleasant to be understood so readily. And now I have come to you to ask your assistance."

And now was Mr. Redhorn's opportunity for exercising his high moral principles! "The deluded female" was about to ask him to undertake the painting of Grey House; probably, also, to prepare an estimate of cost of same. His moment had come! But the speech he had so often rehearsed in secret, all save the words "respectfully decline," had vanished from his memory. Still, the two words would be sufficient—if he could only say them. . . . To his shame he knew that he could not say them. Yet, perhaps, it was not the temptation

of the cash involved in one of the biggest jobs in his experience that alone brought about this feeble state of mind. Leaning against the edge of the bench, he gazed helplessly at the dirty floor.

"I have come to you to ask your assistance, Mr. Redhorn," she repeated in low, persuasive tones.

"Ye're welcome, mem," he returned at last in a far-away voice, without looking up. "I'll dae ma—ma best to please ye."

"How good of you!" Certainly this was the most agreeable prospective customer of the painter's career, but he was now too confused to appreciate the agreeableness as he ought to have done.

"I'll tell you what I want in as few words as possible," she continued briskly. "Before converting Grey House from its present condition, I very much wish to convert the people of Fairport from theirs. You understand?" (Mr. Redhorn didn't, but he made an inarticulate sound which was cheerfully accepted as indicating assent.) "I am simply determined to gain the sympathy of Fairport towards our cause. With a colony of sympathizers around it, Grey House will indeed be a happy resting-place for our tired labourers. So, to begin with, a few friends and myself are going to hold a meeting in the hall, on Friday evening of next week, when we shall do all we can to put our aims and so on clearly before the people

of Airport. I am confident that the people of Airport will understand our position from our brief speeches as they cannot be expected to do from the newspapers. And so I have come to the man whom I believe to be respected by the people, the man whom I know to be just, the man whom I know to be gifted with much intelligence and the power of expressing himself—I have come to *you*, Mr. Redhorn, to ask you, on Friday evening of next week, to take the chair."

It is no exaggeration to say that at these words the brain of Joseph Redhorn reeled, and that he reeled slightly himself. He put out a hand to steady himself and knocked over a pot of pink paint.

Too late Mrs. Methven sprang from her seat. A spirt of paint reached her pearly grey skirt. For a moment she looked thoroughly angry, but the expression of the luckless painter's countenance was too much for her sense of dignity. Still flushed, she broke into a kindly laugh.

"Oh, mem! What ha'e I done?" cried Mr. Redhorn, in horror and dismay. "Eediot that I am!" he added, securing turpentine and a handful of clean rags, and falling on his knees.

"Don't distress yourself," she said gently and untruthfully; "it's a very old one, really."

With babblings of apology and self-reproach he strove to remove the stains, but was far from successful, the pearly grey being of a peculiarly absorbent nature. "I've made it

waur!" he groaned despairingly. "Mem, gi'e me a pentin' job to dae for ye—onything ye like—an' I'll dae it for naethin', an' thenk ye for the opportunity. Oh, yer bonnie dress! Oh, mem, what can I say?"

"Not another word, Mr. Redhorn, please. We can't help accidents. If I may, I will sit down again until the turpentine dries. I'm so fond of the smell! And perhaps you will allow me to explain what I would like you to do at our meeting." And the painter having resumed his position at the bench, a picture of misery and humility, she proceeded to talk as he had never before heard woman talk.

Doubtless, she was taking an unfair advantage; yet who shall say that Mr. Redhorn's ultimate acquiescence in her wishes resulted wholly from the upsetting of a paint-pot?

Half an hour later she took her departure, leaving him in a semi-dazed condition from which he did not fully recover that day, while her final words kept jumbling in his memory till long past midnight.

"I'm so glad I can depend on one man," she had said. "If you were to fail me, I don't know what I should do. I don't believe I could face the Fairport meeting without you. But I *know* you won't fail me. I trust you. Good-bye, Mr. Redhorn. We shall meet again before the event. And remember that all this is a secret between us."

The ensuing ten days were almost more than

Joseph Redhorn could bear. His faithful apprentice made reference to the "meddicine" every three hours or so. Vain were the master's reprimands, his protestations that his agony was mental, not physical; and eventually he was compelled to take Willie into his confidence.

"An' what about the pentin' job?" said Willie.

▼

How he found courage to set out for the hall, Mr. Redhorn does not yet know. He had only a dim memory of leaving his abode while the rest of Fairport was taking its evening meal, sneaking along a back way, and gaining admittance to the little committee room behind the platform by means of the window. According to his watch, he spent two hours and twenty minutes in solitude ere the ladies arrived, not that their arrival was any relief to him.

"We are going to have a splendid meeting," said Mrs. Methven brightly, ignoring the chairman's abject nervousness. "You have kept our secret, Mr. Redhorn?"

Joseph allowed he had done so, adding that in answer to numerous inquiries he had merely replied that he *might* attend the meeting.

"It will be a surprise when you step upon the platform! And it will make all the difference to us when the audience sees that we have your support. Oh—and about your speech? Well,

you have only to declare, in a few words, the meeting open, and introduce the speakers, and, if you feel inspired, make some remarks at the end. I have jotted down what is actually necessary on this slip. And, by the bye, this other slip bears an invitation which I want you to give at the beginning."

Mr. Redhorn examined the second slip, shook his head, and groaned. "There's no' a man in Fairport wud accep' this invitation."

"But you will give it, Mr. Redhorn?"

"Mem," he said dully, "I've come to the condeetion o' mind whaur I wud stan' on ma heid if ye said the word—an' I'm nae acrobat, an' never was."

Six ladies followed by the chairman appeared on the narrow platform. A slight flutter of applause ended in a great gasp. Then there was laughter.

Mr. Redhorn began to speak without delay. At the last moment he had nerved himself to his task, and he remembered some of the speech which he had been studying for more than a week.

"Leddies an' gentlemen," he began, "seein' that this is ma first appearance on ony platform in the capacity o' chairman, I beg ye will kindly excuse ma incongruity, as the leddies to ma richt an' left ha'e kindly consented to excuse it. Ye ken the objec' o' this meetin', so I needna' harp on that—Johnnie McPhee, keep

yer feet still!—but afore introducin' the speakers o' fame an' experience—oh, ye'll be surprised when ye hear them!—I ha'e an invitation to—to proclaim." Here Mr. Redhorn paused to cough, and received a few personal remarks from the audience, such as "Wire in, Ridhorn; ye're daein' fine!" and "Mind ye dinna get the jile, Joseph. We'll maybe no' bail ye oot!" Then he read from a slip as follows: "Ye will observe several vacant chairs on the platform, gentlemen. I ha'e pleasure in invitin' ony gentlemen in the audience to show their sympathy wi' the cause, an' to support the chairman, by fillin' them."

At this there was a burst of laughter and ironic applause which, however, suddenly subsided. For, to the utter amazement of the chairman and the majority of the audience, several men rose slowly to their feet. They were the local fishmonger, the grocer, the butcher, the young baker, the slater, the pier-master, and a couple of gardeners—in short, the most important men in the village. For a brief space they stared suspiciously at one another, and appeared about to resume their seats. But the young baker, his face on fire, led the way, and one after another they shuffled awkwardly to the platform and bashfully took seats. It is worthy of record that they filled the vacancies exactly.

From that moment the success of the meeting was assured. If the audience was not

wholly sympathetic, it was at least attentive, and Mrs. Methven and her colleagues were allowed to explain themselves to their hearts' content.

A few weeks later, Mr. Redhorn and his apprentice were hard at work on the interior of the Grey House. On a certain afternoon Mr. Redhorn, who chanced to be in unusually bright spirits, was whistling, "The Girl I Left Behind Me," through his teeth, when the boy (not necessarily inspired by the tune) put the question—

"What did ye say was a deluded female?"

The painter's whistling ceased abruptly, and for a long minute he painted in silence. Then—

"I've just the yin thing to say aboot a deluded female, laddie; and that is: She's no' to be compared wi' a deluded male, which is a creature wi' high moral principles, noted for bein' terrible but just. The species is no' unknown in Fairport. N.B.—Pey attention to yer pentin'!"

XI

“THE COMET”

I

“**H**A’E ye heard aboot the comet, Mairster Ridhorn?” asked the apprentice, toying with the big scissors.

“Whatna comet?” muttered the painter, who was endeavouring to fit a strip of wall-paper into a peculiarly awkward angle of the attic.

“The comet that’s fleein’ aboot the noo, that people is talkin’ aboot——”

“Oh, ay; I’ve heard aboot it, an’ dootless we’ll be beholdin’ it shortly. But we’ll no’ discuss it at present. Tits, laddie! I wish ye wud haud yer tongue!” cried Mr. Redhorn, as his finger went through the paper. “Can ye no’ confine yer observations to observin’ what I’m daein’? I brocht ye here the day so as ye could get a lesson in paperhangin’ under distractin’ circumstances. I’ve been in the profession five-an’-thirty year, an’ I’ve never yet approached the paperin’ o’ an attic wi’ feelin’s o’ pleesure. But it’s got to be done gey frequent in the career o’ a penter; an’ as ye’re gaun to be a penter some day, Wullie, ye maun pey close attention to what I’m daein’. D’ye see?”

“Ay.”

“As for the comet,” continued Mr. Redhorn, taking a few paces backwards in order to view his handiwork, “it’s an interrestin’ subjec’; an’ if ye like to come an’ tak’ yer tea wi’ me the nicht, I’ll be gled to discuss it wi’ ye. It’s pleasin’ to see youth takin’ an interest in scienteeific problems forbye sports, an’ I wud be the last to discourage ye, laddie. But, in the meantime, pey attention to——”

“But, Maister Ridhorn, are ye no’ feart?” the boy asked seriously.

“Feart! Feart for what?”

“The comet!”

“Hoots, laddie!” said the painter, “wha wud be feart for a comet? The days o’ supperstition is past, excep’ maybe in the case o’ savages an’ cannibals an’ the like. Pey attention——”

“But the comet’s maybe gaun to strike the warld an’ burn us a’ up!”

Mr. Redhorn dropped his brush, and regarded his apprentice with astonishment.

“Strike the warld an’ burn us a’ up!” he repeated at last. “Wha pit that notion into yer juvenile heid?”

“Danks, the fishmonger, was speakin’ aboot it at denner-time. I heard him tellin’ some o’ the men.”

“It’s a’ nonsense,” said the painter. “Dinna fash yersel’ aboot comets—unless they’re conventional comets inventit by me, Joseph Ridhorn, in the form o’ a stencil for dadoes,

etceetera. Some day I'll let ye try yer haun' at them. As for comets in the firma-
ment—”

“But Danks said it was the truth—he read it in a paper—”

“The truth!” Mr. Redhorn produced a melancholy smile. “They say that truth is stranger nor fiction,” he said slowly, “but I think it depends on the leear. Did they no’ laugh at Danks?”

“Some o’ them did.”

“Weel, weel! I wud advise ye, laddie, to jine wi’ them that laughed. Criftens! I never heard the like! A’ the scientefic men is agreed that the comet’ll dae nae damage here below. Ye’re no’ feart noo, are ye, laddie?”

“I’m no’ feart, if you’re no’ feart.”

“Me? I wud see masel’ feart for a hen first! I dinna believe onybody’s feart—onybody in Fairport, onywey, efter that lectur’ Professor Baikie gi’ed to the Mutual Improvement Association. It was maist reassurin’. A man wi’ a face like the professor couldna tell a lee.”

“It was a gey funny face,” remarked Willie, grinning. “Like a bun wi’ a crack in it, an’ twa currants and a cherry.”

“Laddie!” said the painter sternly, “hoo daur ye speak sae disrespectfu’ o’ a learned an’ greatly esteemed gentleman?”

“Weel, what wud *you* say it was like, Mais-
ter Ridhorn?”

Mr. Redhorn stroked his nose. He was not often at a loss for words. But now he hesitated. Besides, he realized that he could not improve on his apprentice's description.

"Pey attention," he said at last. "See hoo I measure for the next piece o' paper."

"I'm peyin' attention," said Willie agreeably. "But I can tell ye somebody that's rale feart for the comet."

"Eh?" The painter paused in straightening his rule. "Wha's that?"

"Auld John McNab."

Mr. Redhorn turned sharply upon the boy. "I'm no' wantin' to hear ony jokes aboot a puir auld man like John McNab. If ye canna respec' learnin', ye maun respec' age. John McNab's near ninety year auld."

"But I wasna jokin'," Willie returned in an aggrieved tone of voice. "It was jist the truth. He *is* feart—awfu' feart—for the comet. Danks said he was near greetin'. Some o' the ither tried for to get him to believe the comet wudna hurt him, but it was nae use."

"Was it Danks that was tellin' him aboot the comet?"

"Ay."

Mr. Redhorn's mouth opened and—closed. He was addicted to big but not to "bad" words. Yet only the presence of the boy saved him then from the latter. Willie, however, had never seen his master look so angry.

"Wullie," said Mr. Redhorn, breaking a long

silence, “wud ye strike an auld man—wud ye fling stanes at him?”

“No’ likely!”

“Aweel, never say onything to mak’ an auld man feart. I didna think even Danks wud ha’e done sic a thing.”

“Danks done it for fun.”

“Fun! Dae *you* think it was fun?”

Certainly Willie did not think so now. He hung his head. He had always hated Danks, yet he had sided with the majority in sniggering at the fishmonger’s account of the old man’s terror. He expected reproaches from his master, but the latter merely said:

“We’ll noo proceed wi’ wur present duty, which is paper-hangin’.”

II

About eight o’clock, in the evening of the same day, Mr. Redhorn tapped on the door of the little cottage occupied by John McNab and his wife. The old woman opened to him without delay, but, instead of the usual ready invitation to enter, he encountered a raised forefinger and a whispered “Sh!” Then she stepped out, closing the door behind her.

“Is he nappin’?” asked the painter.

“Nappin’! I wisht he was.” She sighed heavily. A shaft of lamp-light from the window touched her face, and the man saw that she was suffering. “Maister Ridhorn,” she said in a low voice, “ha’e ye heard aboot the comet?”

" 'Deed, ay,'" he replied, with exaggerated cheerfulness. " I was readin' aboot it the nicht. We'll be gettin' a view o' it afore lang. It's causin' great interest to the astronomical profession, an' I confess I'm no' disinterrested ma-sel' in the unique heavenly body. I was readin'—"

Mrs. McNab interrupted him. " Ha'e ye heard aboot ma man?"

Mr. Redhorn hesitated. Then he said:

" But ye'll no' be a believer in ony ill effec's frae the comet, Mistress McNab? Ye dinna think it's gaun to burn us a' up?" And he emitted a feeble cackle.

" I've been wishin' it wud burn us a' up, an' be quick aboot it," she murmured bitterly. " Oh, Maister Ridhorn," she went on, " I dinna ken what to dae wi' John. He's got the fear intil his heid, an' naethin'll tak' it oot. For three days he's been sittin' at the fireside, mournin' to hissel', an' hardly speakin' to me. An' we've been man an' wife for near saxty year. Oh, Maister Ridhorn, what for did they tell an auld man like ma John sic an awfu' story? It was fun to them, but it's death to him an' me."

" Whisht, whisht!" said the painter softly, " Ye mauna loss heart like that. It'll a' come richt. I'll sune prove to John that the comet's no' dangerous. I've some papers in ma pooch, fu' o' scienteeific remarks. I've likewise a couple o' bottles o' John's favourite beverage, viz.:

ginger wine. Wi' the help o' wisdom an' wine
we'll surely get the notion oot o' his heid.
Eh? You tak' chairge o' this bottle till he
needs it. I'll present the ither."

She shook her head.

"Ye've aye been rale kind to ma man," she
said, "but I doot ye canna help him noo. Even
the doctor couldna help him the day. He
doesna seem to understaun'. He doesna care
if ye laugh aboot the comet, nor if ye speak
serious. He jist says the comet's comin', an'
we're a' as guid as done for."

"But can I no' see him?" inquired the
painter, almost hoping the answer would be in
the negative.

Mrs. McNab put her apron to her eyes.

"Ye've never been turned frae this door,"
she said quietly, "an' I canna turn ye noo. It's
rale kind o' ye. But dinna be offendit if he
doesna speak to ye. . . . Gang ben."

"Ye needna announce me," said Mr. Red-
horn, unconsciously quoting from a novelette
which he had read the previous evening, and
pressing one of the bottles upon her.

She pushed open the door.

"John," she said, "here's Joseph Ridhorn
come to see ye."

"It's a cauld nicht, John," the painter re-
marked, genially, but nervously, advancing to-
wards the fire.

The old man in the arm-chair made no re-
sponse; he did not even raise his eyes.

"Sit ye doon," whispered Mrs. McNab, indicating a chair. "Ha'e patience wi' him."

Mr. Redhorn nodded and seated himself near the table, on which he laid a bundle of newspapers and a brown-paper parcel obviously containing a bottle.

"A cauld nicht, John," he said, for the second time.

The observation was followed by an uncomfortable silence. The painter stroked his long nose, smoothed his scanty hair, and breathed with a faint hissing sound. Mrs. McNab stood by the table, twisting a corner of her apron.

Mr. Redhorn made another effort—

"Terrible crool weather for them as is troubled wi' chilblains. Nex' to dyspepsia, I conseedar chilblains the warst affliction o' mankind—that is, o' the non-fatal variety. I was readin' the ither day that chilblains was whiles due to a thing ca'ed anaemia. Queer names the medical profession invents! I've seen the word afore in print—but merely in passin', as it were—an' I aye thocht it was the name o' yin o' the female goddesses that was worshipped by the ancient Romans. Hooever, it appears to be a disease o' or'nar' quality. I trust ye'll never ken what it's like, John."

Here Mr. Redhorn came to a stop. 'The old man did not appear to have heard 'im. The old woman sighed. Turning to her, the painter signed a request for glasses, and proceeded to unwrap the bottle.

"It's no' exac'ly the New Year, John," he said. It was, to be precise, the twenty-first of February. "But, as I yinst heard a preacher say, every day begins a new year; an' in ony case a little innocent conveeviality'll dae us nae hairm. Ginger-wine stimulates the interior wi'oot producin' ony desire to sing, dance, or quarrel. The brain is no' affectit by it." Mr. Redhorn patted the bottle and glanced at the old man. "An' I ken ye're pairtial to it."

Mr. McNab made a slight movement, but did not raise his eyes. His lips moved, however.

"Joseph," he murmured, "I hope ye're prepared."

For an instant Mr. Redhorn stared. Then from his pocket he brought a corkscrew.

"I am that," he replied. "I had a forebodin' that ye wudna ha'e a screw handy. As a learned professor observed on a certain occasion, a corkit bottle wi'oot a screw can cause mair mental agony nor the biggest volume o' Greek wi'oot a dictionary."

"Joseph," said the old man solemnly, "dinna mock me. Are ye prepared for the comin' o' the comet?"

Mr. Redhorn moved uneasily on his chair, but replied steadily enough—

"I am, John."

"Are ye prepared for—for what's comin' after the comet?"

Mr. Redhorn hurriedly inserted the screw and drew the cork, while Mrs. McNab, having

set glasses on the table, retired to the other apartment of the cottage.

"We'll discuss the comet immediately," said the painter, with an attempt at cheerfulness, as he poured out the greenish fluid. "I bocht some papers to read to ye. Ha'e!" He presented a glass to the old man, who shook his head, but held out his hand.

"It's rale kind o' ye, Joseph, but I'm no heedin' aboot it. I'm done wi' the pleesures o' this warld."

"Weel," said the painter soothingly, "snap up this wee drap, no' to please yersel', but to please an auld frien'. As a matter o' fac', numerous persons regaird this wine as a meddicine, pure an' simple; an' never yet was meddicine regairded as a warldly pleasure or carnal delight. Jist try a taste; an' if ye think it's ower deleecious, ye needna tak' ony mair." So saying, the painter took a sip and made a wry face. "Tits!" he murmured, "I'm feart this'll no' please ye. It's no' like the lot I had afore the New Year. I doot I've got a bad vintage this time. Feech! It's no' what I expectit. I maun apologize to ye, John, for——"

Mr. McNab, having tasted, coughed.

"It's no' extra nice," he remarked. He took another sip, and shook his white head. "It's gey like meddicine, as ye said, Joseph . . . but I maun try to swallow it . . . ye've been that kind . . . ay, I maun try to force it doon . . . I hope ye're prepared, Joseph."

Mr. Redhorn opened the bundle of newspapers.

"I'll read ye what the famed astronomers say aboot the comet."

The old man raised a protesting hand and groaned.

"Dinna fash yersel'. When the comet comes, it'll mak' nae odds to onybody what they've said."

"But wi' yin accord they say the comet'll dae nae damage whatsoever. Can ye no' believe that, John?"

"It'll be the end o' the warld!"

"But—but surely ye can believe what dizzens o' learned men tell ye. What does Danks or onybody in Fairport ken aboot comets? D'ye no' see that the wise men are in the majority? You're in the minority, John."

"So was Noah," said the old man.

The painter stroked his nose.

"I confess ye had me there," he said.

"I believe what I believe," Mr. McNab said in a heavy voice. He took a drink from his glass, smacked his lips, and frowned. "This is rale nesty stuff," he remarked.

"An' dae ye believe," the other gently inquired, "dae ye believe there's nae hope for the warld when the comet arrives, this day week?"

"Hope? Man, we'll a' be burnt up—consumed i' the fiery furnace! Oh, Joseph, I hope ye're prepared!"

"I canna say I am," said the painter seri-

ously. He reached out and replenished the old man's glass. "An' a week is awfu' short notice. I wish ye saw ma ledger. In a' my professional career I've never had sae mony accoonts to collect. But if the warld's comin' to an end, I suppose there's nae use plaguin' folk for cash."

Mr. McNab refreshed himself and breathed hard.

"Nae use ava'," he said drearily. "The only accoont to be settled is the accoont wi' yer conscience."

"Jist that, John. But that'll be a terrible sum for a man like me. I trust *you've* got everything settled in that direction?"

The old man did not reply. His hands shook, his mouth quivered. For a moment or two the visitor feared he was going to cry.

"See, John! Ye're forgettin' yer meddicine."

Mr. McNab groaned, took a drink, and groaned again. Then in a shamed voice he said—

"I'm a meeserable sinner!"

"We're a' that, John; we're a' that."

"But I maun tell ye the truth, Joseph. I—I'm no' prepared."

"Ye've a week yet."

"I'm no' prepared," the old man repeated, ignoring the painter's attempt at comfort, "an' I'll never be prepared. I've a muckle lee on ma conscience, an' I canna rest for the thocht o' it."

"A lee! Dod, I've sae mony ither crimes that I'll no' ha'e time to reckon lees ava'. Oh, man, I've been a deevil in ma past! Ye dinna ken what it is to be a sinner——"

"I want to tell ye aboot the lee, Joseph," said Mr. McNab, as if he had not heard. "It's been gaun on for years. I—I've been pretendin' I was five year aulder nor ma true age. I've been pretendin' to be a year aulder nor Mistress Baxter. Ye see, I didna want her to be the auldest inhabitant o' Fairport. An' I've been tellin' lees richt an' left. It's no' lang since I tell't the meenister I was ninety-twa, an' I've been deceivin' yersel', Joseph,—you that's aye been guid to me——"

"Aw, never heed aboot that, John," said Mr. Redhorn kindly. "Ye never deceived me, for I never believed ye."

"What! Ye thocht I was a leear?" cried Mr. McNab indignantly.

"Na, na," hastily returned the painter; "I never thocht that. I merely preshumed ye was makin' a sma' miscalculation."

The old man nodded sadly.

"Ye was aye a generous man, Joseph," he sighed. "But I'm feart the Lord'll no' conseedar it a sma' miscalculation, as ye ca' it."

"Keep yer mind easy on that score. D'ye think the Lord's gaun to condemn ninety per cent. o' the females in creation? An' if ye're no' ninety-twa, noo, ye'll be ninety-twa some day." Mr. Redhorn smote the table. "Drink

up yer wine, John, an' dinna fash yersel' aboot yer sins, nor the comet either. Listen till I read ye what the astronomers say."

Having recharged his host's glass, Mr. Redhorn proceeded to read with much unction, and an occasional stumble, the words of the learned. At the end of ten minutes he stopped and looked rather triumphantly at his host, as much as to say: "Deny that, if ye can!" But the old man had dropped into a peaceful doze. Mr. Redhorn removed the glass from the withered hand and placed it on the table. Then he went in search of Mrs. McNab.

"I think John's beginnin' to feel easier in his mind," he said. "He's ha'ein' a bit nap noo, so I'll bid ye guid-nicht. Gi'e him a drap o' the wine in het water when he gangs to his bed, an' tak' a drap yersel', an' dinna fash aboot the comet. We'll get him awa' frae the subjec' gradual-like. I'll come back the morn's nicht. Nae thanks required, mistress," he concluded, making a hurried exit.

An hour later Mr. McNab awoke. He felt wonderfully comfortable and comforted. Presently he perceived that his wife, seated in the chair on the other side of the hearth, was asleep. Poor old woman, she was worn out. Mr. McNab, however, was too aged to realize what a trouble he was. With a sly smile, he rose cautiously from his chair and stepped stealthily to the table. As he tilted the bottle

his wife stirred. The bottle slipped from his fingers. There was a crash—

"Oh, mercy!" cried the old woman, starting up. "Is't the comet?"

"I wisht it was," he replied crossly. And a senile tear trickled slowly down his cheeks.

"Sit ye doon, John—sit ye doon," she said tenderly. "He brocht ye twa bottles. Rest ye, an' I'll get ye the ither."

III

The comet had come and gone. Fairport was generally agreed that it had made a "puir show," and that "a wee thing pleased astronomers forbye weans." Popular feeling had forced Mr. Danks, the fishmonger, to eat his words so far as they concerned old McNab, and to present that individual with a peace-offering in the shape of a nice fowl and a pound of sausages. At first, the recipient was inclined to ascribe the gift to genuine fear of the comet on the part of the giver; but as every one in Fairport was now eager to assure him that the comet would prove harmless, his own fear, already weakened by the painter's influence, gave way rapidly, and by the time the comet became visible, had disappeared altogether. It may be mentioned that, being unable to detect the apparition, he was even inclined to be a little sceptical of the comet's existence. Nevertheless, he seemed to find endless satisfaction

in discussing with Mr. Redhorn the possibility of the occurrence of other and larger comets in the near future.

One evening, about six weeks after the event, Mr. Redhorn, assisted by his apprentice, was engaged in making out his quarterly accounts, and incidentally remarking on the same, when a tapping at the door interrupted a dissertation on the evils of credit.

"Awa' an' see wha it is, Wullie," said Joseph wearily.

"It's auld McNab," replied Willie. "I ken his knock."

"If it's fameiliar to you, laddie, what is it to me?" returned the painter, with a heavy sigh. "But we maun let the auld man in."

Mr. McNab entered almost jauntily.

"Aw, it's you, John," said Mr. Redhorn kindly, if hurriedly. "I was thinkin' o' comin' to see ye the nicht, but I'm that busy wi' ma accoonts."

"Ay, ay," said the old man. "Ye'll no' ha'e had time to read ony mair aboot comets, I suppose? I wud like fine if a comet wud come that ma sicht could see."

"'Deed, ay. I've nae doot ye'll ha'e that gratification, yet, John." Mr. Redhorn rose and dived into a cupboard, and emerged with a parcel not unsuggestive of a quart bottle. "I' the meantime, wud ye tak' this hame wi' ye, in case I canna bring it sune? An' ye'll excuse

me no' biddin' ye wait, for thae accoonts is worryin' me."

"Certainly, certainly. Dinna apologize, Joseph. I'm greatly obliged to ye. I'll no' interrup' ye." And hugging that which he had come for, Mr. McNab went gladly forth.

Mr. Redhorn smiled ruefully.

"Ye've got to ha'e patience wi' auld age, Wullie," he remarked. "That's the tenth bottle since the time o' the comet. But we'll no' say ony mair aboot it. It's a secret, laddie,—mind that! Proceed wi' addressin' yer envelopes, an' mind to pit an 'esquire' to the names o' male folk that keep a servant."

On his homeward way Mr. McNab encountered the minister.

"Isn't it rather a cold night for you, John?" the latter pleasantly inquired.

"Oh, I'm gey hardy, sir."

"You must be. It is really wonderful at your age. But I must not keep you standing. Good-night to you. Oh, by the way, what *is* your age, John?"

"I'll be ninety-three come July," Mr. McNab replied. And, without a blush, toddled on.

XII

“HIS MONEY OR HIS LEG”

WHEN the time for the apportioning of blame arrived (as sooner or later it is bound to arrive in the case of all humanly-constituted committees) Mr. Joseph Redhorn was the sole recipient. He was the originator of the scheme—therefore he was responsible for its failure. On that point the seven prominent bachelor natives of Fairport, who three months earlier had unanimously if somewhat informally elected him chairman, were most cordially in agreement. The fact that Mr. Redhorn's monetary stake in the scheme was as large as all their stakes added together did not appeal to them as an extenuating circumstance; nor could the reflection that all their meetings had taken place in Mr. Redhorn's house, with the accompaniment of Mr. Redhorn's hospitality in the shape of strong tobacco and rather weak ginger wine, influence their judgment—namely, that he had induced them to put good money into a bad business, even allowing that the said business was not wholly unconnected with charity.

“It’s no’ the loss o’ the cash; it’s the bein’ diddled,” said the plumber, glancing round the table.

“Nae doot Ridhorn meant weel,” remarked a jobbing gardener, “but he should ha’e gotten some kin’ o’ security frae McPhun afore he gi’ed him the leg.”

“I aye had ma doots aboot McPhun,” another grumbled.

“I’m no’ sayin’ onything agin McPhun,” Mr. Danks, the fishmonger, sourly observed. “I dinna blame a man for takin’ a’ he can get in this warld. But I blame a man for cajolin’ his neebours into lendin’ money an’ pretendin’——”

“Order, order!” This from the junior partner of the local joinery firm. Having only five shillings at stake he could afford to amuse himself by occasionally interrupting speakers.

“Order be——” began Mr. Danks.

“Whisht!” cried Mr. Redhorn from the head of the table. Thus far no one had suggested his vacating the chair. No man could have been more distressed and disappointed by the unfortunate failure of his scheme than Joseph; but naturally enough he was also irritated by his neighbours’ criticism, much of it quite unjust.

“Whisht!” he cried again. “There’s nae need for bad language here, Maister Danks. An’ as for the rest o’ ye, I’m only askin’ ye for a fair hearin’——”

"Hear, hear!" put in the young joiner.

"Clay up!" said the baker, "an' let the man speak."

Mr. Redhorn stroked his nose and then passed his hand over his hair.

"I admit we're in a painful poseetion," he said; "but I can assure ye, it was unforeseen. I can assure ye likewise that I pretended naethin', in spite o' what Maister Danks has said. As for the cajolery to which he referred, it's jist possible that in his case I was compelled to use cajolery—it bein' the only wey on earth to extrac' money frae him."

Mr. Danks opened his mouth; but there were several laughs, and he checked an angry rejoinder.

Mr. Redhorn proceeded. "Ye've come here the nicht to gi'e me a slatin'—in ither words, to pass a vote of censure upon me. An' I think ye've come likewise, to see if there's ony chance o' gettin' yer money back. Weel, that's but human, an' I sympathize wi' ye. But afore discussin' the possibeeility—if ony—o' gettin' yer money back, I wud jist like to remind ye o' hoo ye cam' to advance it, an' hoo I cam' to ask ye to advance it—"

"We ken a' about that," the fishmonger muttered.

"Let Ridhorn be," said the baker.

"Thenk ye," said the painter gratefully. "I think it's best to refresh yer memories on twa-three p'ints. In the first place, we a' agreed

that Jake McPhun's wudden leg was a disgrace to Fairport, forbye bein' a stumblin' block to the man's career. It was an ugly thing, an' it unfitted him for his profession o' gardener, an' when he tried workin' on the pier the end was forever stickin' atween the planks, an'—”

“ It was a great savin' in socks,” the plumber remarked.

“ Ye've made that joke afore. Weel, I'll pass on to the second p'int,” proceeded the painter, “ which is that Jake McPhun was in danger o' landin' in the workhoose—”

“ He'll land there yet, the lazy character,” said Mr. Danks. “ An' serve him richt!”

Mr. Redhorn ignored the interruption. “ An' though nane o' us had ony parteeclar regaird for the man, we couldna deny that he had had bad luck, an' neither could we deny that wi' a proper leg he nicht mak' an honest an' comfortable livin'. The third p'int is that we decided to gi'e him the chance—”

“ It was yersel' decided it a'.” The observation came from several of the committee.

“ Weel, weel, I admit I set the ba' rollin', as the sayin' is. But ye a' agreed to help, which I conseedered rale decent o' ye, conseederin' that McPhun was a'ready in debt to sundry o' ye. An' the fourth an' final p'int is that in due season Jake McPhun got his wish in the shape o' a splendid handsome patent leg, costin' us seeeven pound fifteen shillin's net, which sum

he was to pey back to us by the instalment system, sae pop'lar nooadays, at the rate o' three shillin's per week. Is that no' correc'?"

"Ay, it's correc' enough," said the fishmonger sulkily; "but the only p'int worth mentionin' noo is the p'int that in three month the man has never peyed back a penny. That's the p'int, Ridhorn, an' I'll be gled if ye'll stick to it."

"I'm boun' to admit that McPhun hasna kep' his promise. But, maybe, if we gi'e him time——"

"Gi'e him time! Can ye no see that the man's jist takin' advantage o' us?" said Mr. Danks furiously. "He can get plenty of work, but he winna dae a stroke mair nor he can help—jist suffeecient to keep him in comfort, but no' to pey his debt. He's no tryin' to pey us. We've a' been diddled, an' it's thenks to Ridhorn."

"That's aboot the size o' 't," said the jobbing gardener, and others expressed their agreement with the remark.

Mr. Redhorn stroked his nose. He was feeling angry and vexed. He stood to lose, not only four pounds, but also the good-will of his neighbours which, secretly, he valued more than much money.

"I suppose ye've askit him reg'lar for the cash?" said the baker.

"Oh, ay—ay, certainly, maist assuredly—I've

askit him vera reg'lar. He aye says he'll try an' pey something next week. I think if we ha'e patience—"

Mr. Danks gave a loud snort, and the plumber, with a look of inspiration, put the question—

"Did we no' get a receipt for the leg, Ridhorn?"

"We got a receipt frae the maker."

"But frae McPhun?"

"Na. But—" Mr. Redhorn hesitated. "We got a letter frae him, expressin' his shupreme gratitude, an'—"

"Hurry up!" said Danks. "Never heed aboot his shupreme gratitude. What else?"

"Agreein' to pey the three shillin's a week till a' was peyed."

"Ha'e ye got the letter?"

Mr. Redhorn nodded unwillingly.

Mr. Danks smote the table with his fist and glared around him. "Then," he cried, "we've got the beggar safe, an' by jingo! we'll tak' back wur leg!"

A shout of applause and some laughter went up.

"We'll tak' back wur leg!" repeated Mr. Danks, "an' if he wants it again, he can bring the cash. Ridhorn, produce that letter o' shupreme gratitude!"

"What!" the painter exclaimed. "What! Wud ye tak' the man's leg frae under him?"

"Jist that! Let him habble on his auld yin

till he can pey for a better. I'm no' gaun to be swindled, I can tell ye."

"Nor me," said the plumber.

"Nor me," echoed the jobbing gardener.

"It'll maybe force him to pey," said the baker, with a snicker. "He'll be that affronted at ha'ein' to weer than auld stump again."

"Question," cried the young joiner.

Mr. Redhorn's faded blue eyes shone with indignation.

"Peter Danks," he said, his thin tenor voice trembling, "ye dinna possess the feelin's o' a —a finnan haddie! As for the rest o' ye, I'm black ashamed o' ye. Dae ye no' think shame o' yersel's? Ye actually propose to tak' the leg frae under the man! Weel, I propose itherwise. I beg to propose that Jake McPhun gets keepin' the leg, free, gratis, an' for naethin', wi' wur united compliments. I tell ye it'll be worth the money to see him gaun aboot the place on——"

A storm of protest drowned the painter's words. Mr. Redhorn was rudely requested to retire and boil his head, to clay up, to cease making a cod of himself, and so forth. Mr. Danks delivered an impassioned address on the idiocy of throwing away good money and encouraging a rank loafer. It was received with acclamation.

But in the interval Mr. Redhorn recovered himself and his temper. A faint, dry smile appeared on his melancholy lips.

"I perceive that ma proposal has been unfavourably received," he said quietly. "Bein' masel' the largest creditor, I intend to keep McPhun's letter, but I promise no' to destroy it in case it's required when the trial comes on. I'm preshumin' that ye'll provoke the aid o' the law to get yer shares o' the leg."

"Havers!" said Mr. Danks. "We'll get the leg wi'oot ony law."

"I'm wonderin' hoo ye'll manage that. McPhun could kill three o' ye wi' his left han'."

There was a silence. No one could deny that McPhun, maimed as he was, was by far the strongest man in Fairport.

"Oh, we'll get the leg," said the plumber jauntily, at last. "It's nane o' your business, Ridhorn, hoo we get it."

"True, excep' that when ye've got it ye'll be owin' me fower pound sterlin'."

"We'll see aboot that," retorted the fish merchant.

"An' see that ye dinna dae ony damage to the leg," the painter mildly rejoined; adding, "or to yersel's. I've naethin' furder to say."

As no one else seemed to have anything further to say, the meeting dissolved itself. Mr. Danks and several of the others departed without a word, but the baker and the young joiner, having recovered their good humour, delayed to chaff the painter, a proceeding which Mr. Redhorn bore with calmness. Then, in round-about fashion, they endeavoured to dis-

cover the painter's intentions. Did he intend to warn McPhun or to assist him in any way? Mr. Redhorn was amazingly frank; he assured them that he had no intentions whatsoever of interfering with what he termed their "in-human but businesslike ambeetions." He, for one, would not stand in the way of their gaining possession of the leg, though he would have them remember his part-ownership thereof. They left him, somewhat puzzled by his coolness.

Mr. Redhorn, having set his house in order by the simple process of removing four chairs and three empty boxes from the table to the walls, helped himself to a dose of "Digestive Elixir" with the remark "prevention is better nor cure," and lit a cigarette. He then procured pen, ink, and paper, and seated himself on the chair which remained at the table. Half an hour later he left the house.

It was a dark, cold, wet night in December—time, nine o'clock. The road was deserted, but as he passed through the village he was aware of a silent watcher in at least three doorways. He was also aware that one of the watchers followed him. The spy, however, was rather at a loss when Mr. Redhorn walked past the cottage tenanted by Jake McPhun; he was annoyed when, two miles further on, Mr. Redhorn continued to walk as briskly as ever; and five minutes later he turned for home a sad, but not a wiser, man. The painter did not reach

his abode until near midnight. He was tired but not unhappy. The walk had checked a threatened headache, though he gave the elixir credit for that, and he had dropped a letter, with a superscription in a very much disguised writing, into the post office of the next village.

"But I doot it's jist yersel' ye're thinkin' aboot, Joseph," he said to himself as he got into bed. "It's no' a' for Jake McPhun. . . . Still, there's naethin' illegal in killin' twa birds wi' the yin stane. Ye canna aye be a dove; whiles ye've got to be a serpent, whether ye like it or no'." And with some other and somewhat similar reflections he fell asleep.

Many were the plans proposed by the conspirators for the seizing of the leg. Seven, indeed, were seriously under consideration; but each was eventually rejected by six votes to one. They were chiefly noteworthy for the guile involved, and were deemed far too complicated by all save the proposers. The crudest specimen was that put forward by the baker, who was for bringing the local Samson low by the simple method of much beer. The baker being an abstainer, thanks to a wholesome dread of his aged, but active mother, could not, of course, take any practical part in the operation. He was impolitely told to go and drink cocoa.

"There's nae use beatin' aboot the bush," said Mr. Danks, on the afternoon following the meeting at the painter's. "We've got the law

an' every richt on wur side. We maun strike while the iron's hot. An' seeeven o' us, though we dinna set up to be gladiators, is surely enough for McPhun. Ma final proposal is this: At nine o'clock the nicht we'll gang to McPhun in a body, and demand his money or his leg."

"Hear, hear!" said the young joiner. "Are we to black wur faces or weer masks?"

"Ye can keep that for when ye gang courtin'," replied Mr. Danks unkindly. "Are ye a' agreed?"

"Wull *you* dae the speakin'?" they asked him.

"Ye can leave that to me."

After ten minutes or so of argument the plan was adopted. Needless to say, it was to be kept profoundly secret.

At the appointed hour the seven were gathered outside the cottage. At least three expressed their entire readiness to remain outside while the others transacted the business within, but their companions would not hear of such a thing.

"Come on," said Mr. Danks shortly, and led the way to the door.

Mr. Danks knocked loudly.

"Step in!"

Mr. Danks opened the door, and the company entered the kitchen in single file, the majority looking as if they wished they hadn't come.

McPhun was sitting by the hearth, smoking

a pipe and reading a ragged newspaper of comparatively ancient date. He was wearing his old peg of a leg, the end of which rested on the stove.

“Mercy!” he exclaimed, with a glance at the crowd, but without any attempt at rising; “what’s this?—yin o’ thae fashionable paygeants I’ve been readin’ aboot, or a poleetical depitation?”

“Ye’re welcome to yer joke, ma man,” replied Mr. Danks acidly. “But we’re here on business.”

“Jist as weel, for I canna offer ye onything in the wey of pleasure. What’s the business?”

“Fine ye ken, Jake McPhun! It’s the busi-
ness ye’ve neglectit every week for the last three
month. There’s thirteen weeks at three shillin’s
per week—an’ we want wur money—nine an’
thirty shillin’s.”

“Ye can ca’ it nine an’ thirty thoosan’ pounds,
if ye like,” said Mr. McPhun calmly, “for I
canna pey ye a penny the noo. I thocht the
kindness that advanced the money wud ha’e
streetched furder nor three month. I’ll pey ye
as sunie’s I can.”

The baker, looking rather ashamed, whis-
pered something to Mr. Danks, but was in-
structed to hold his tongue.

“We’ve had plenty promises frae you, Mc-
Phun,” the fishmonger said. “We want satis-
faction yin wey or anither. If ye’re no’ gaun
to pey”—(here Mr. Danks hesitated)—“we

demand possession o' the leg, an' ye'll get it back when ye pey the price. I'm sayin'”—he raised his rough voice—“we demand possession o' the leg.”

“Oh, the leg—it's the leg ye're wantin'!” Mr. McPhun smiled, and jerked his head sideways. “Ye'll fin' it in the corner thonder. Jist help yersel'.”

At these words the deputation seemed to shrink—individually, collectively.

“Fetch the leg,” said Mr. Danks to the plumber in a voice still loud, but from which some of the importance had departed.

“Fetch it yersel’,” replied the plumber.

With as much dignity as he could muster the fishmonger fetched it, saying:

“I've to inform ye, afore thur witnesses, that ye'll get the leg on peyin' the price.”

“Hooch, ay! Dinna fash yersel’, Danks. Queer things thaе paygeants. You chaps should get up a paygeant in Fairport for the simmer veesitors. I'll len' ye this paper when I'm through wi' 't.” Mr. McPhun regarded them all with the blandest of looks. “Onything else the nicht?”

With one accord, without a word, they made for the door.

“Are ye awa’?” he cried in feigned surprise. “Weel, weel; guid-nicht to ye, an' pleesant dreams.” Then he burst into a great guffaw, which followed them to the road.

It was not a happy moment for the fish-

monger. Gingerly holding the leg, he stood dumb while his followers reviled him.

"Ye've made a muckle cod o' yersel', Danks."

"When this comes oot we'll be the laughin' stocks o' Fairport."

"He was laughin' at us a' the time, an' espacially at yersel', ye fat-heidit gowk!"

"Noo ye've gotten the leg, what are ye gaun to dae wi' t. Pit it in yer-winda wi' the fish?"

"McPhun's no' heedin' aboot the leg. He'll never pey a penny. Ridhorn was richt. It's you, Danks, that has diddled us a'."

Alas for loyalty! Alas for human greatness!

Mr. Danks founds words at last. "There's been some trickery, I tell ye; there's been some trickery," he said feebly. "Ye needna blame me. Ye agreed to the plan."

"You proposed it. But what's to be done wi' the leg?"

Mr. Danks plucked up spirit.

"We'll sell it, an' divide the proceeds."

"Divide yer granny!" the plumber cried. "What aboot Ridhorn? An' whaur wud ye sell it? I'll bet ma bonnet there's no' a man in the United Kingdom wud fit it. It had to be made spacial for big McPhun. Sell it? Awa' an' eat grass, man!"

"Start a museum," the young joiner suggested.

"Ye can dae what ye like wi' the leg," said Mr. Danks angrily. "Wha's wantin' it?" He held it out.

Not a hand was stretched forth.

“I’ve a guid mind to throw it in the loch.”

“Ye’re forgettin’ Ridhorn.”

“Weel, what d’ye want me to dae wi’ t?” roared the distracted fishmonger.

One of his followers held up a warning hand.

“Whisht, whisht! Here somebody comin’!”

Mr. Danks backed to the sea wall, concealing most of the leg behind him. A pale moon peeped round a cloud.

“It’s Joseph Ridhorn!” whispered the baker.

There was no time for further speech. The painter, accompanied by his apprentice, was upon them. Willie, by the way, had been doing some scouting work for his master during the evening.

“Fine nicht,” Joseph remarked agreeably.

The group murmured a confused response.

The painter halted, peering at Mr. Danks. He laughed softly, and said—

“I observe what the novelles refer to as a slender ankle, likewise a dainty fit, frae which I conclude that yer mission has been successful. I congratulate ye a’ on securin’ the prize, or trophy, wi’oot apparent bloodshed. Did ye meet wi’ desperate resistance?”

No one answered.

“I happened to be in the toon the day,” Mr. Redhorn continued pleasantly, “an’ it occurred to me to invest in a shillin’s worth o’ legal advice as advertised in the evenin’ papers. I

confess that ye get an awfu’ wee tate o’ legal advice for a shillin’. Still, I learnt yin p’int o’ the law. It appears that the leg’ll require to be pit up to public auction—unless sold by private treaty at a feegure satisfactory to a meetin’ o’ the creditors. An’ sae far as cash is concerned, I’m the majority, an’ in favour o’ public auction, which, if it doesna bring profit to us, wull dootless bring conseederable amusement to wur frien’s an’ neebours. I hope ye like the idea. I wonder what we’ll get for the leg. It’s a braw leg, but, of course, it’s no’ what ye wud ca’ a pop’lar article. Still, public auction, even if it brings hauf-naethin’, is fair an’ square. What d’ye say, Danks?”

“I dinna believe aboot yer public auction.”

“I’m no’ for ha’ein’ onything public,” said the baker. “The rest o’ ye is welcome to the leg. I withdraw ma claim.”

“Same here,” the plumber said. “I think the joke’s gone far enough.”

The others looked from Danks to Redhorn, from Redhorn to Danks. Which of these two old enemies was going to win?

The painter spoke at last.

“In ma humble opeenion,” he said, “wur frien’ the plumber has jist made the maist sensible observation that could be made. He thinks the joke’s gone far enough. I think the same, though ye’ve a’ got the better o’ me in securin’ the leg.” The group moved uneasily. “Is there onybody here,” demanded Mr. Red-

horn abruptly, "that doesna think the **joke's** gone far enough?"

Not a response.

"The joke—which is the leg—ha'ein' gone far enough, I propose sendin' it back to **Jake McPhun**. Wullie'll rin wi' 't this meenute. What d'ye say, **Danks?**"

Mr. Danks pushed the leg into the boy's arms.

"Bide a meenute, Wullie," commanded the painter, producing from his pocket a sheet of paper. "I ha'e here," he said cheerfully, "a receipt for the money due by **Jake McPhun** to us yins. I likewise ha'e a pincil that winna rub oot. I propose that we a' sign the paper, an' it'll maybe help **McPhun** to see the joke better."

"Hear, hear!" said the young joiner. "I've got matches."

"Here wi' the leg, Wullie! We need something to write on. Wha's first? **Danks!**"

There was no help for it. The fishmonger, with a wry grin, affixed his signature.

Presently Willie was despatched to **McPhun's** cottage, and the men set off for the village.

"Ye'll a' come in wi' me, an' ha'e a sup o' ginger wine. It's comin' near the New Year," said Mr. Redhorn. "An' then we'll sweer oorsel's to secrecy."

Mr. Danks hung back, but the others dragged and pushed him through the doorway.

"I've only the yin thing to say noo," said

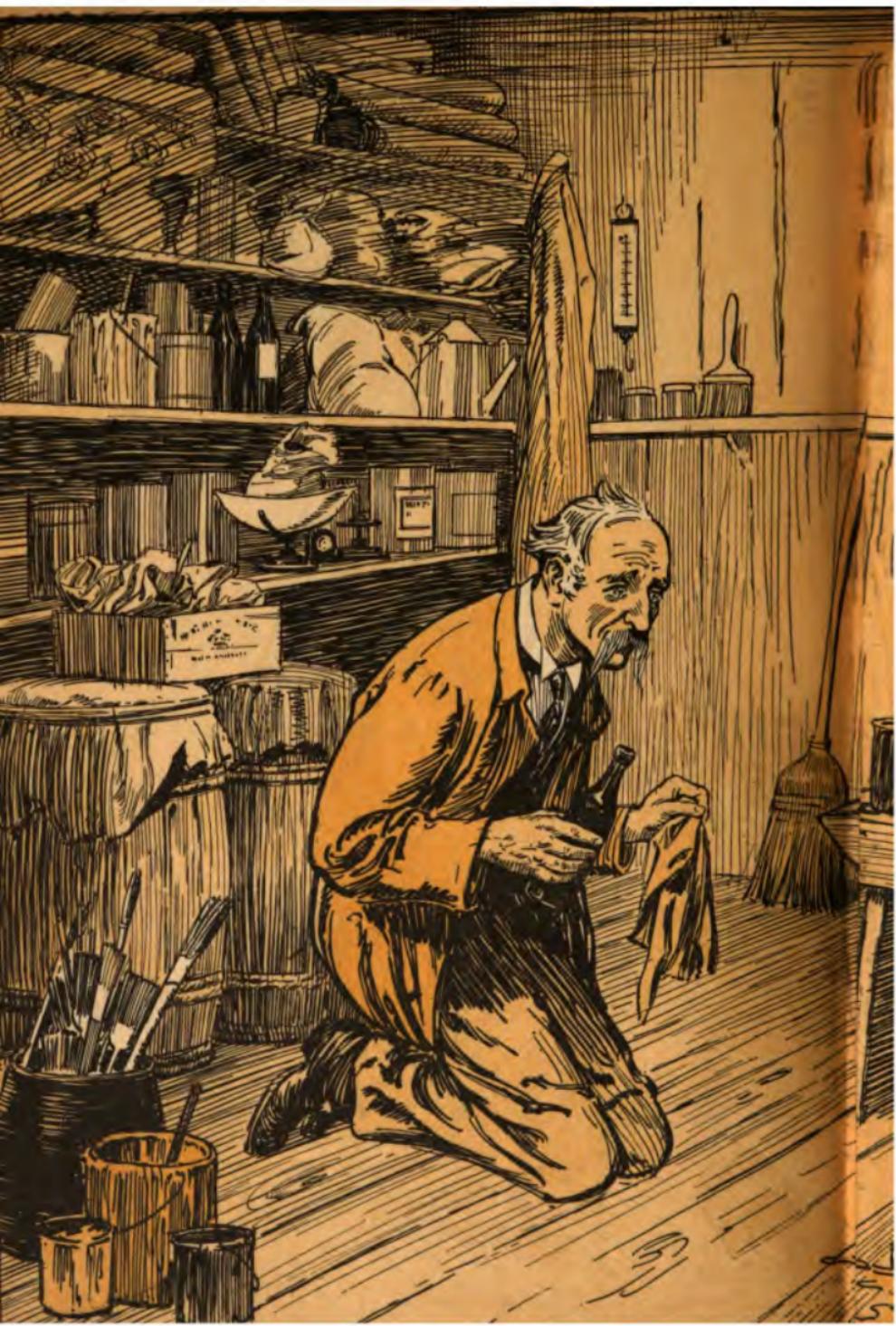
the host, ten minutes later, "which is that I've been coddin' ye a', an' I maun confess that Jake McPhun was helpin' me." He produced a fat purse, and, after a little hesitation, continued: "Ye see, McPhun peyed up in full the day—whaur he got the cash is nane o' wur business—an' I've noo shupreme pleesure in distributin' the sums due ye, pro ratio. Ye'll forgi'e me no' mentionin' this earlier, but I wanted to see how ye wud secure the leg, an' likewise whether ye could be as generous as I believed ye could. I've been weel satisfied on baith p'ints."

And Mr. Redhorn, having produced the biggest, if not the brightest and best fiction of his life, shook hands all round.

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"Oh, yer bonnie dress! Oh, mem, what can I say?" (Page 128.)

